



Encounter, Integration, Learning
Highlights of the recent annual meeting
Member news, resources and more

From our president, Mualla Selçuk

"Integration of Faith and Learning"

It is a privilege to begin my term as the President of the Religious Education Association in 2018. Being elected as the first Muslim president is a special honor for me, and I will do my best to serve you well during my term. I am especially grateful that I will be able to rely on the shoulders of wise board members and our past Presidents' invaluable experiences. They deserve an enormous thank you from all of us for their guidance and the rich legacy they leave behind.

Preparation for my presidency over the past years included my role as a program chair, and my participation in board and annual meetings. All of these provided me with a chance to learn firsthand about the activities of the REA. What has been immediately apparent for me is that collaboration is the norm. REA is working with its members in various ways: through publication, through dialogue, through networks. Together we are interpreting the nature, purposes and value of the field of religious education to the wider society, to



practitioners, to researchers and to other leaders in the field. Therefore I have had an inner feeling to translate this collaborative academic circle to the scholars of Ankara University, my home university. My hope has been to connect them with the wonderful work being done in the field by REA and its members and to let them hear about the themes that are developed each year and embodied in dozens of thoughtful presentations.

Thus coming back from our annual meeting we had in St. Louis last November I decided to have some conversations with my colleagues and my students to explore how REA impacts the way religious educators lead and teach future generations through these annual meetings. At first, I and some of my colleagues who participated in the conference informed them about the papers presented on the theme of “learning in encounter.”

After their deep engagement with the presentations, the students and scholars carried on an interesting debate around ongoing oppressive practices and perspectives against people unlike ourselves, and what would be the best methods in religious education to overcome the situation. They engaged the wonderful ideas offered, yet they also wanted to have some more “how-tos” as take-aways: how to put these ideas into practice and through which means? Finally, one of them asked, “What do you get out of such



international relationships in terms of teaching religion?” “Integration of faith and learning,” replied one of the PhD students with a loud voice. “What kind?” I asked. One of the scholars wanted to clarify the point by adding the value of intercultural and inter-religious education to the debate. The real progressive element in religious education, he suggested, was to include international aspects for all levels of education to democratize education rather than limiting it to a traditional culture of an exclusive nature.

The workshop went along with a feeling of encouraging more religious educators to be free from lecturing about doctrines and dogmas to devote themselves to inter-religious research and give guidance to their students by being role models. In some way the

workshop created a level of understanding that the most important factor is the teacher and her attitude toward learning.

At the end of this day spent in reflecting on the interactions, I felt happy that the workshop helped to recognize that teachers make greater differences than any methodology. Teachers are certainly key factors in learning. The teacher who institutes a process known as “reading the World” in which she examines the actual World



surrounding students can help them learn more about “reading the Word of God.” We come to see an atmosphere of trust could be established quickly if teachers themselves are well prepared in issues related to diversity, differences, equity, discrimination, injustice, before asking students to do the same. This insight brought me back to the point raised by the student: the activity of integrating faith and learning, and the challenges that teachers encounter. I know that the phrase “integration of faith and learning” is widely used in religious educational circles, and mostly used by students as a slogan to refer to the aim of religious education. In most cases, the meaning is ambiguous, being left to personal understanding or remaining unexplained.

Probably those who use integration of faith and learning as a goal believe that religious education itself as a subject makes a contribution to this reforming process. But I think it should be more than that. Integration is a skill that needs to be developed throughout education. When education fails to integrate faith and learning, the common result is a split between the two, in other words a division between faith and life. For us as religious education scholars, this means that our agenda ought to be directed toward building solid interpretations of life and faith.

In interpreting the meaning of faith and life, our religious education should be willing to raise questions about critical experiences we have in life. Experiences that have shaped our worldview. Experiences we share with each other in different life situations. Experiences that beg the question: What does it mean to learn in the light of our faith? We need to be thinking about whether our current curricula adequately train teachers to work on inquiring into what messages our faith transmits in a specific situation to people unlike us. Should we be teaching prospective teachers to consider how others might view the situation through their faith? Can they integrate new conclusions about the nature of humanity and the natural world with their faith and belief? Or do they seek further information that confirms their position? Do they perceive new knowledge as an opportunity for strengthening faith, or as a potential threat? Can they ask the questions of what is left unsaid? Are we helping them to create a learning environment which becomes a place of dialogue and interaction? Are we providing them with leadership skills that will carry over into their way of teaching, to facilitate the learning process of their students with regard to ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds? How do students make sense through integrating faith and learning in the classroom?



Integration is a complex and lifelong practice and will require serious dialogical encounters over time. I see these regular meetings of REA providing me with multiple opportunities for exploring my own questions, some of which I mentioned above, and also for learning how to discuss issues from a different angle of vision. I have come to consider new possibilities towards a better interpretation of human nature and human dignity through the light of faith. Relating to each other on this level of shared humanity

gives us the opportunity to become witnesses of each other's beliefs and way of life. I know I could not have made this journey alone. Even with a quick overview of the themes of recent meetings of REA, one can recognize the emphasis on values of inclusion to offer a better view of the world, of life, and of humanity:

- [Generating Hope: The Future of the Teaching Profession in a Globalized World](#) (2016);
- [Connecting, Disrupting, Transforming: Imagination's Power as the Heart of Religious Education](#) (2015);
- [Religion and Education in the \(Un\)making of Violence](#) (2014);
- [Coming Out Religiously: Religion, the Public Sphere, and Religious Identity Formation](#) (2013);
- [Let Freedom Ring: Religious Education at the Intersection of Social Justice, Liberation, and Civil/Human Rights](#) (2012);
- [Brain Matters: Neuroscience, Creativity, and Diversity](#) (2011);
- [In the Flow: Learning Religion and Religiously Learning amidst Global Cultural Flows](#) (2010).

Those meetings cover a broad range of principles to promote a positive attitude towards who we are to each other. Addressing philosophical, theological, and pedagogical approaches formed by the perspective of religious education, they offer many opportunities to gain profound knowledge and a friendly understanding of the other. Furthermore, they manage to establish a more solid foundation that can help teachers move toward deeper stages of integration of faith and learning to detect bias and misconception.

With an emphasis on values of inclusion, by creating a sense of being together in the name of God and challenging dominant social and cultural structures, they provide a valuable starting point for how to live by our faith. Our annual meetings help us reconstruct the meaning of religious education which has major influence on our teaching experiences in (inter)faith education. By careful analysis of knowledge claims, they provide a touchstone for clarifying, refining and gaining insight into integrating across the various disciplines and bringing life into learning.

I believe further extensive research needs to be done on teaching practices presented in each of the meetings. There should be much to learn and much to contribute to approach integration in a coherent way. Subsequently the powerful papers presented in REA conferences can become data that not only inform our work as scholars but also can broaden prospective teachers' understanding towards different cultures and faiths.

Religions and cultures speak with each other through people. Thank you REA for expanding the conversation!

Mualla Selçuk
Ankara University
Turkey

First Wornom Innovation Grant awarded

Lakisha Lockhart is the director of a project which has been awarded the first Wornom Innovation Grant, for a project entitled “Art, Faith, and the Pursuit of Justice: The Sanctuaries and Interreligious Interculturalism among Artists Working for Social Change.” Lakisha applied to the Wornom Award in her role as the President of ARC: Arts | Religion | Culture. She and other ARC members will work on a project that taps into the power of the arts to speak to unaffiliated “Nones” and religiously diverse young adults together in intercultural communities of shared learning, spiritual formation, and artistic collaboration. Central to the project is a partnership between ARC and The Sanctuaries, a DC-based organization.



Founded in 2013, The Sanctuaries is the first interfaith arts community that “harnesses the power of creative arts to transform divisive issues of race and religion into forces for personal growth and social change.” The Sanctuaries serve more than 140 multimedia artists of diverse racial and religious backgrounds that work together across their differences to design projects and host performances that amplify marginalized voices and model intercultural collaboration. The Sanctuaries and ARC have an established relationship in which ARC has assisted them in reviewing and revising their training program, updating a curriculum for artists who are looking to further deepen their own faith commitments by means of making art in community for the purpose of supporting grassroots social justice work.

Art, Faith, and the Pursuit of Justice is a project of research and dissemination. It will seek to discern (1) what motivates the leadership of The Sanctuaries and participants and (2) the effect that faith-based artists can have on local communities when they are committed to the practice of amplifying the voices of justice campaigns. The project will lift up insights, harvest lessons from practice, and publish ARC’s findings about this innovative group at the leading edge of exploring the emerging landscape of American religious identity and work for justice.

For more information, [please contact Lakisha](#). Details about applying for the 2018 Wornom innovation grant [are available on our website](#).

Congratulations to newly elected Board members

We are pleased to congratulate the following members who are joining the REA Board. Photos and bios of these new members of our board [are available on our website](#).

Hanan Alexander, Vice-President & 2019 Program Chair. Dr. Alexander is on the faculty of the University of Haifa in Israel.

Tony Vrame, REA Treasurer. Dr. Vrame is currently the Director of the Department of Religious Education of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

Elena Soto, Secretary of the REA. Dr. Soto teaches at Fordham University Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education and the Fordham Preparatory School in New York City.

A. Jos de Kock, Chair of the Standing Committee on Religious Education in Academic Disciplines and Institutions Standing Committee. Dr. de Kock is on the faculty of the Protestant Theological University in The Netherlands.

Mary Elizabeth Moore, Chair of the Harper/Wornom Committee. Dr. Moore is Dean of the School of Theology at Boston University.

In addition to new board members, **Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook**, Dean of the Faculty at the Claremont School of Theology was elected to the Nominations Committee as a member-at-large, and **Lucinda Mosher**, Faculty Associate at Hartford Seminary, was appointed to the Harper/Wornom Committee.

Support learning in encounter and the REA

Please consider supporting encounters in learning through our organization!

Here are 6 concrete ways you can do that:

1. Read, cite, and write [for our journal](#)! Every member has access to the journal online, and it's a simple task to ensure that you are citing relevant materials. Every time an article is downloaded we get credit for it — and often financial support, depending on how that download happens. Keep in mind that the managing editor at Taylor and Francis has put together a “top cited articles” publicity campaign giving free access to the four most frequently cited articles in relation to the Web of Science index from the past 2 years. Here's the link: <http://explore.tandfonline.com/content/ed/urea-most-cited-articles> This is a great place to begin!

2. Make it a habit to tell friends and colleagues about the scholarship of our association. There are far too many people who still do not have any sense of what the field of religious education is all about. You can [download brochures](#) from our website.
3. Share our meeting resources. We work hard to get our plenary presentations, proceedings, and other resources from the meeting available as quickly as we can following the annual meeting. You can continue to access [a specific meeting's website](#), read every [recent meeting's proceedings](#), and [view our videos](#).
4. Make a donation! You can do this any time you wish via our ["donate today" button](#) on the website.
5. Buy books through [our Amazon bookstore](#), and let us know when you have books coming out that we can add to the bookstore!
6. Make REA your [SmileAmazon choice](#) and always go to Amazon through that page.

2018 Annual Meeting Theme

Start thinking now about your response to our [2018 Annual Conference Call for Proposals](#). The online submission process will be available in March, with a deadline of May 1st for proposals.

Dr. Kathy Winings, program chair for the 2018 meeting, introduces her theme — **Beyond White Normativity: Creating Brave Spaces** — in this way:

We, as men and women of faith, are living in a time of profound conflict and crisis, not unlike other eras that we have had to face. Recent events such as white supremacist rallies in the United States, the push for a wall between Mexico and the United States, calls to close national borders to economic and political refugees, and the rise of nationalist candidates in European elections point to the fact that at the heart of this conflict is the intractable problem of white normativity, white privilege, and intolerance of “the other”.

This issue is not new to us as religious educators, though. Our field has long been engaged in this struggle through scholarship, publications, ministries and courses that address whiteness, white normativity and discrimination. But the entrenched systemic racism, intolerance and xenophobia that we are experiencing require that we continually reflect on how we are engaging our students in these issues. Are we teaching them to recognize how white privilege divides people, perpetuates inequalities, distorts one’s worldviews and prevents them from relating to one another authentically? Have we opened discussions as to how some of us have benefited from white privilege and how others have been denied such privileges? Are we encouraging our students to ask how religious educators and practitioners can work together to deconstruct white normativity, privilege and supremacy? More positively, are we creating an environment in classrooms and other learning spaces that challenges and encourages people to be authentically human, and so live in the presence of all others?

Follow the blog throughout the year and share your experiences in teaching to form such brave spaces. Also contribute to the “resources list” that is available on the REA 2018 annual meeting page — including books, articles, blogs, associations and web-based resources.

More details about the specifics of the call for proposals, and the process for responding to the call, [are available online](#).

Attend to your internet security, please

Several members have reported receiving what are called “phishing” attempts — that is, an email directed to you which appears to come from the REA or an REA official, and asks you to share your private information, or worse yet, to purchase something and transfer it to the email sender. We will *never* ask you for private information to be sent to us through email, not ask you to send us funds through email. We will always use our website, which carries a secure https url (<https://religiouseducation.net>).

If you receive any suspicious email, please alert us, and please do not ever hesitate to ask questions about anything you receive from us.

Resources

[MoralCapital.info](#) is a robust website which offers an entry point into the field of Moral Education internationally. The site has sources and resources relevant to all aspects of Moral Education — content, philosophy, and expertise. Resources shared there are primarily in English but come from all parts of the globe.

The website **Jewish Philanthropy** recently highlighted Liron Lipinsky’s work with the [BadgeQuest: Discover, Play, and Create](#) program in Jewish Education.

The Center for Ministry in Teaching at the Virginia Theological Seminary is offering a free downloadable resource for ["Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John"](#) during Lent.

[The Human Magazine](#) is an online magazine created by and for reflective seminarians and others attempting to engender a positive message between church and society. It is a very “young” online effort but our past president Dean Blevins notes that he “hopes it has legs in the future in the Wesleyan tradition.”

Member News

Jerome Berryman announces two new books: *Becoming Like a Child*, and *Stories of God at Home: A Godly Play Approach*.

Aaron Ghiloni recommends **Bert Roebben's** recent book, *Theology Made in Dignity: On the Precarious Role of Theology in Religious Education*, and points to a review he has written of it: <https://www.degruyter.com/view/j/ijpt.2017.21.issue-2/ijpt-2017-0025/ijpt-2017-0025.xml>

Robert Jackson shared the video of the ceremony awarding him an honorary doctorate at the Norwegian School of Theology in Oslo:
<https://vimeo.com/album/4829289/video/239451505>

John Littleton announces his new book, *Enhance Learning in Parishes: A Learning Community Approach for Church Congregations*, available from MediaCom Education Inc, Adelaide, Australia <http://www.mediacom.org.au/jl>

Membership Dues Have Increased

The REA Board works hard to keep our conference and operating expenses down, and membership dues have remained fixed since 2013. Now, however, the Board feels compelled to increase dues to meet current budget requirements. At its November 2017 meeting, the Board voted to do so as follows: the lowest income category will not increase at all, the next income group will increase by \$10 per year, the third by \$15, and the highest income category by \$20. We hope you will agree with the Board's decision to maintain the membership cost for the lowest income category at its current level. However, the consequences of that conviction are such that we will be very grateful if you are able to contribute even a little bit more [by way of donation](#). Thank you to those generous members who regularly include a donation with their renewals!



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

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Voucher expires: 31 December 2018