



## From our president, Mualla Selçuk

In the early years of my career as a religious educator if someone told me that I was going to serve as the president of the Religious Education Association, I would have never believed them. Dear colleagues, thank you for your confidence and partnership. Serving as the president of such a distinguished community has truly been a transforming experience. Certainly a challenge but also a gift and a blessing. As always, I begin my remarks with thanks and gratitude to God saying *Elhamdulillah*.

*Elhamdulillah* is a Muslim way of expressing gratitude by using the word we commonly use when we refer to God as Allah. The first important teaching of Islam focuses on the existence and oneness of Allah. This central teaching includes the notion that all goodness and beauty has its source in God. God





creates and constantly sustains the cosmos. God provides for every living being on the earth, His mercy is infinite.

Working with you, I am blessed to meet wonderful people from different backgrounds near and far. Each encounter has taught me a new thing, widened my perspective and helped me reflect on my tradition in ways that I could in no way do by myself. This generous way of being with one another, the most human activity, has taken me deeper into dealing with the meaning of life and the nature of the ultimate order of things. We are social beings and we grow through interactions with other people. Social interaction offers us a real opportunity to create a different learning medium and environment in religious education. It enables deeper discovery of the richness of our faith. Interfaith interaction is a journey to explore what kind of human beings God wants

us to be. It opens the way to achieving true information about each other as human beings, and creates a space for eliminating incorrect stereotypes and prejudgments about each other. Furthermore, it provides a bridge for benefitting from one another's humanity by practicing values such as humbleness, kindness, justice, forgiveness, and mercy. It reminds us that there is always more to learn, and prevents us from the danger of an endless endeavor not to see one another fully in our uniqueness.



But how can encounter help someone who sees the stranger as a potential threat, who believes that they know the ultimate truth and have nothing to learn from the other, who cannot resist the drive to search for people like themselves, and who sees their neighbors as enemies and sees themselves as blameless?

How can encounter help us when religion becomes an element of conflict, where harsh economic and political forces seem to be dividing people and causing great suffering? How is our faith going to assist in creating a society that is open and free for all? What will be then in the heart of our education?

I believe we have an answer: The core of our energy is faithful people-in-encounter. None of those problems should undermine God's relationship with us as faithful people. Instead, they teach us not to treat this world as absolute, but rather to turn to God as the only source of hope, love, and mercy. The challenges we experience today are examples of our finite human conditions that also have the potential to make us search for deeper meanings and see what lies behind the immediate.

As people of faith we create brave spaces for a different set of questions about why we do what we do, who we are, and which story we are part of; questions about what it means to believe in God, to love God; questions about what it means to be a good person before God. Our faith in God provides a structure and a form for our education and creates something new out of the destruction caused by the stories we are told in this incredibly challenging world. Our belief has the power to eliminate idols and question whether absolute truth is in the stories we are told all our lives. We can seek to find what lies beyond the way things seem to be. Belief in God comes into play with its powerful reality that is stronger than any conflict.

I believe there exists a common concern for the good life. A common concern that empowers us to see ourselves in relation to each other and in relation to the divine origin of humanity. The more we see each other as equal participants made by God's hands (38 Sad:75), the more we see issues that connect us.

To achieve (or more realistically come close to) this common concern we need to move beyond our own cultural and religious borders and exchange knowledge and information in different aspects of life. God endowed human beings with significance as vice-regents, male and female. We should discover new insights by bringing together the "already known" and finding out "what could be for today."

Each of us will bring to the table methods and philosophies of presenting faith in teaching practices, and each can share perspectives from their own Scriptures. Then together we will explore alternative interpretations to give life more meaning in the face of uncertainty.

I do hope that the dialogue between my description and your response will create a greater understanding of an approach that is most appropriate to our inter-faith relationship to serve as God's dignified stewards on earth. In a community of those who do God's will I believe that God offers forgiveness, acceptance, and freedom. The gift of our traditions are their particularities, all the different vocabularies and systems of virtues. I say let us move forward with it. Let us enrich each other by different theologically informed voices. Learning together can be hope for all of us.

So it is especially fitting that Kathy Winings, current REA president-elect and 2018 program chair, has selected as the theme of our upcoming annual meeting Beyond White Normativity: Creating Brave Spaces. It was rewarding for all of us to listen to Kathy during our Board retreat in Atlanta. Her theme will continue to make us think deeply on how religious education can effectively address white normativity in its many forms, and help us to wonder who we are and who we can be as men and women of faith.

Dear Members of the REA, please notice that all is about you and it starts with you. You are the reason that the REA exists. Sure, we Board members have our personal and administrative goals but together as an organization we are here for you. In a climate of openness and acceptance, the REA builds networks to provide insight into how we might envision different educational experiences for respecting diversity and valuing equality. I

want to engage all of us in thinking about the directions in which we would like the REA to impact the world, and make this world a safer place individually and collectively. May REA continue to blossom and bear fruit!

## From our program chair and president-elect, Kathy Winings

While preparing for this year's Annual Program, I have taken time to reflect, personally and professionally, as to how I see the problem of white normativity being maintained in the United States, and how effectively it is being challenged in our classrooms and faith communities. While I speak from a very specific context, as a North American white female academic, I hope my words invite you to ponder your own settings. The challenge of racial, cultural, class, language, and religious bias exists in most countries. Honesty about our own experience and racial/cultural/class perspective is an essential first step for creating brave spaces.

The first experience that aided my reflection on our 2018 theme was the Netflix series called *Dear White People*. *Dear White People* is a drama set in a fictitious and predominantly white elite university that focuses on the lives of its African American students. Episodes explore the students



and their relationships, challenges in their social-emotional growth, and their efforts to maneuver through their racialized undergraduate experience. A key thread running throughout the series is a radio podcast called “Dear White People” developed by one of the main actors, a young woman also seeking to find her place and role not only in the university but in the world. The podcast becomes the vehicle through which she tries to awaken the white community on campus to the reality of how the dominant white culture controls and oppresses students of color and the inability of these students to feel at home in the university. She tries to put a mirror in front of the white community so that they can see the problem with their attitudes, behaviors and words. I had to ask myself, do the students of color feel welcome on our very real campuses and in our courses? Are their narratives part of our courses? Do we support and learn from our colleagues with African, Asian, Hispanic, and South Pacific heritages about what is at stake in their scholarship and teaching?



The second experience was when I came across long time REA member Nancy Lynn Westfield's posting on the Wabash Center's Teaching and Learning Blog entitled "[Dear White People – 'Woke' Requires Work.](#)" In the essay, the writer raises the issue of how white normativity and the dominant cultural viewpoint is maintained on today's campuses because of the limited resources students are asked to read and the limited knowledge scholars have of sources and narratives that are outside of the dominant cultural perspective. Her concluding sentence really hit home for me: "Creating educational spaces for which the voices of the oppressed and marginalized is taken seriously, respected, even prioritized is a paradigm-shifting act – an act of freedom in which you can participate by the stories you bring into your classroom." I had to ask myself, do my students gain the tools and insights in my courses to challenge the dominant cultural view? Do I use narratives and resources that offer a countervailing view? Are my courses a brave space for students to dare to go beyond the dominant paradigm?

These are important questions facing us as religious educators and practitioners because they provide an invitation to consider the variety of our personal and collective relationships to the structures of white privilege in our Association, the profession, the field, and the religious communities with which we are associated. They challenge us to move our institutions, houses of worship and global culture beyond white normativity and toward Martin Luther King, Jr.'s profound image of beloved community. But more importantly, this is an opportunity to share, discuss and explore ways in which we have created brave spaces and to learn more ways that motivate and challenge our students and communities to use their voices and narratives that will ultimately lead us beyond white normativity.

As we think about and prepare for the program in November, I encourage you to do some reading in the area of white normativity to add to your understanding and social analysis of patterns of bias at work in our various contexts. You can start by looking at the beginning [resource list that is posted on the conference website](#). I also encourage you to do some research into other scholars and voices that you might include in your courses as well as share with colleagues in November. And finally, I encourage you to reflect on the ways your courses might contribute to or maintain white normativity, and ways in which you have created a brave space for your students to find and use their own voices and stories. At the end of the day, that is the hope of the program in November. If we can leave Washington, DC better equipped to recognize the subtleties of white normativity and to move our classrooms and inspire our institutions to become the brave spaces that will move us beyond our dominant cultural biases and prejudices, then that will be a remarkable experience for all of us.

I look forward to our conversation in November at the Reston Hyatt Regency in Washington, DC.

## From our executive secretary, Lucinda Huffaker

As Mualla wrote in her opening notes in this issue of e-REACH, in REA "all is about you and it starts with you. You are the reason that the REA exists."



I remain incredibly energized by all that you are doing around the world to strengthen thoughtful engagement of religion, and to enhance deep learning about God and one another. I am writing to you in this quarterly newsletter to thank you for your good efforts that advance our field AND to urge you to become more involved in the important work of REA.

We need your energy and vision in leadership of this association. As a staff person, I do things like take care of membership, pay the bills,

and organize the annual meeting; however, the essence of REA—what we stand for and what we do—is determined by our leadership, by those of you who step forward to help shape a journey that began in 1903.

This year's theme of creating brave spaces speaks multivalently to many of life's contexts, including the one about which I write: working with your colleagues to transform our world and also to realize such a space when we come together. That means we need representation and commitment from a variety of voices. Please join me in the worthwhile, passionate, challenging, and rewarding work that is the backbone of REA! Please consider if you have interests, commitments, experience, or skills that could aid our activities in the areas below—and let us know!

This year we're seeking nominations for the following positions (descriptions of the positions [are on our web site](#), with the exception of the Advancement Committee, which is a new committee).

- Vice-President/Program Chair-Elect (becomes President)
- Proposals Selection Committee Chair
- Advancement Committee Chair (new position)
- RE in Public Life and the Global Community Committee Chair
- Student Representative
- Harper/Wornom Committee member
- Advancement Committee – 2 members
- RE in Public Life and the Global Community Committee – 2 members



- RE in Academic Disciplines and Institutions Committee – 2 members

In addition to filling the above elected positions, we also need the skills of

- Someone familiar with insurance policies to review the adequacy of REA's policies
- Someone with expertise in organizational structure and advancement to help navigate REA's evolving mission and structure
- And many others we've yet to imagine!

If you have these skills, or you know of someone who might be a good fit for a position, [please email me](#).

If you would like to take a more active role in the leadership of this association, [please email me](#).

If you would like to share your wisdom on finding people for our leadership team, [please email me](#) with your ideas.

The REA has consistently supported educators who are leading diverse communities amidst myriad religious traditions. This mission is ever more important in our world -- please help us to expand and strengthen our association leadership!

## Registration now open for November conference

We are excited to announce that our [November conference registration is now open!](#) When you register for the meeting you can pay using PayPal or Stripe, both of which are secure online resources, both of which work internationally, and both of which take multiple credit cards. You can also immediately [go to the schedule on our meeting website](#), log in to Sched (there is a link to do so near the top of our meeting schedule page) and choose the sessions you would like to attend. If you are new to using Sched, you will need to create a free account there. If you have used it in the past (for any meeting, not simply REA) you can log in using the Sched password you created in the past.

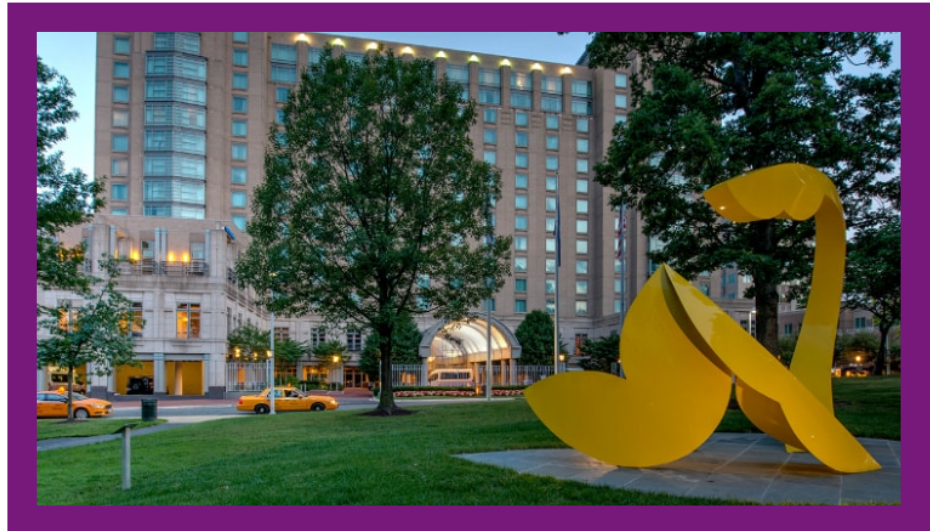
Our meeting will be held at the [Hyatt Regency Reston](#), a hotel in the center of Reston, Virginia, which is very close to Washington, DC. There is a free hotel shuttle from the DC Dulles airport (please note this airport, as there are two major airports in the DC area, and Dulles is the one to fly into for our conference). There are at least two Hyatt shuttles from Dulles, so please make sure you are taking the one marked "Hyatt Regency Reston." REA room rates are \$149 per night, plus taxes, and apply to November 1-4, plus 3 days before and after these dates, as availability allows. Please be sure to say you are with REA when you make your booking (or [book through the meeting website](#)). The last day to book at the REA price is **October 11**. If you have any trouble making your reservation at the REA rate, make your reservation and contact Lucinda Huffaker with

information about the discrepancy. This sometimes happens when we need to enlarge our room block.

It is proving to be far more expensive to hold this meeting near DC than we anticipated three years ago when we made the contract with the hotel. Recently the Steering Committee of the Board met and made several hard decisions. Registration fees have remained the same for several years, but they have been increased for this meeting by about 10%, and a greater percentage of the cost of meals is being passed on to attendees. (These increases are less than the rate of inflation over the same period.)

Registration fees cover about half the cost of meeting rooms, A-V technology, internet, break food and the reception, speakers, and meeting supplies. These are basic costs for the opportunity to gather with colleagues, discuss our work, and enjoy an excellent program of plenary speakers, paper presentations, and outings. We are deeply grateful for your donations and the income from the journal *Religious Education* that continues to subsidize our work together. This year our endowment draw will also help us to keep the fees as low as we can make them.

As in past meetings, we will be holding a “[lightning round](#)” where conference participants will have 90 seconds to share something they’re working on, an issue they want to network around, or some other brief announcement. In order to facilitate this process and make it possible to share website and email contact information, we ask you to sign up for the lightning round in advance, [by filling out this form](#). The first 20 people to sign up will be guaranteed space, and then we will fill out the time from there, in the order in which you sign up. We will also make all of the contact information from this form available to conference participants, so even if you are unable to speak at the mic, your contact info will be available to people.



The DC area is a lovely place to explore before or after our conference, and you can request free visitor information, including a map of the surroundings and a guide to events happening locally from the Washington, DC Tourist portal. Most of the Smithsonian Museums have free admission, but they require that you book a timed entry ticket online in advance. Don't forget the opportunity to visit the Smithsonian's National African American History Museum as part of the pre-conference program (you can [register to participate through Sched](#)).



## ALLLM Sessions at REA

ALLLM, the Society of Leaders in Lifelong Learning for Ministry and REA's first Related Learning Organization, is in the process of finalizing arrangements with Diana Butler Bass to be the speaker for the ALLLM annual banquet on Thursday evening before the REA meeting begins. All REA attendees are invited for the cost of the dinner. Diana Butler Bass is a frequently requested speaker who has written widely on American religion and culture. She recently published Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks. Watch for details in the REA meeting schedule and on the ALLLM website.

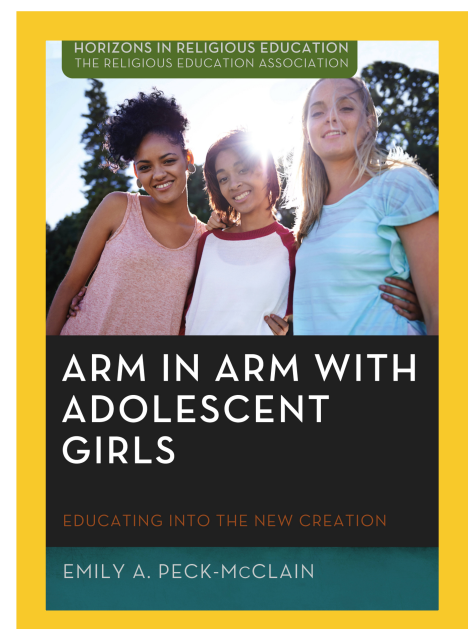
## Wornom Innovation grant deadline approaching

Please note that the deadline for applying for a Wornom Innovation grant is **September 15th**. All REA Members are eligible to apply. Proposals may be submitted for entirely new projects, for innovative developments within an existing project, or for bringing practices or insights from a different sector into religious education settings. Initiatives might include educational programs, practice-based research, or related projects. Members may submit only one proposal each year, and members may work together on a proposal. The grant is intended as a single-year award and is non-renewable.

## Latest book from Horizons series released

The Religious Education association is excited to announce the latest book in the Horizons series: Arm in Arm with Adolescent Girls: Education into the New Creation by Emily Peck-McClain.

"Adolescent girls are filled with passion, excitement, joy, critique, wit, and energy, even as they face and overcome a wide variety of difficult challenges. Some challenges are spirit- and even life-threatening. The stories of more than twenty adolescent girls are put into dialogue with the Apostle Paul, especially in Rom 6-8. Through that perhaps unlikely pairing, those who love and work with adolescent girls will find a depth of understanding and a call to action. Christian educators, pastors, youth workers, parents, and adolescent girls will find a new way to look at the world around them and a new way to bring Scripture to bear on real-life experience. By offering this powerful, scripturally grounded approach to the world around us, adolescent girls will learn compelling methods to put this



perspective into action in their personal lives, social circles, and churches. This thoughtful, respectful look at the lives adolescent girls are living seeks to equip others to fulfill their prophetic voices by calling out the sins of racism, sexism, homophobia, and sizeism in the experiences of these strong and resilient girls."

We caught up with the author recently to learn more about her work.

*What piqued your interest in this research/question in the first place?*



In short, through my years in youth ministry, I found myself ill-equipped by my studies and available curriculum to really speak into the needs of the girls with whom I was in ministry. Through my study of Paul in college and seminary, I found a perspective on the world that was insightful and vivid and helpful for understanding a lot of the challenges in life. But I didn't hear "this Paul" preached in churches or available in curriculum while I worked in youth ministry. I began asking how the Paul I learned about in school might be able to speak into the lives the adolescent girls who were struggling to overcome challenges in their lives and understand their lives in a theological way. When I went back to school for my doctorate, this is the question I went with - what is going on in the lives of adolescent girls and how can Paul speak into their lives in an empowering way? This book is the answer I found to this question.

*What surprised you the most about the project?*

I interviewed 24 girls age 12-19 in hopes of finding a few whose experiences would really lend themselves to a Pauline perspective. What surprised me was that each and every girl shared stories with me that showed how helpful Paul's lens on the world would be. These girls shared so much with me about their lives and struggles and hopes, and their faith. I was also surprised by the sacred space opened through those conversations and their honesty.

*What are the next questions you're working on?*

I continue to be interested in how we can bridge the distance between ages in the church. Much of what my book relies on is adults, especially other women, joining with adolescent girls in and outside the church. I'm interested in how to enable honest, safe, and sacred spaces in the church for honesty and vulnerability to enable and encourage sharing between adults and young people. How can we facilitate communication? How can we appreciate boundaries but not be closed-off? How can we practice vulnerability when we are so versed in social media where we present carefully curated versions of ourselves? I'm also interested in how hope becomes a part of this sharing. Vulnerability is only worth it if we hope for something to come out of it.



## Bringing membership home to REA

This last year has been one of challenges — but also opportunities — as we seek to find good ways to support our members. Three years ago we chose to take responsibility for our membership ourselves and no longer depended on our journal publisher to manage our membership database. Since then we have been using a tool called Wild Apricot to manage our membership database.

While Wild Apricot has served us better than the journal publisher once did, it still has had quirks and obstacles that have made it hard for us to draw on our data well. This year we have worked with our technical consultants, [Tenseg LLC](#), to build a new membership database right on our own website that is organic to the REA.

The good news is that we will now enjoy much more flexibility in engaging our data and many tasks will become easier. The bad news is that this transition will require you to create a new password to access member services, change your profile, or register for meetings.

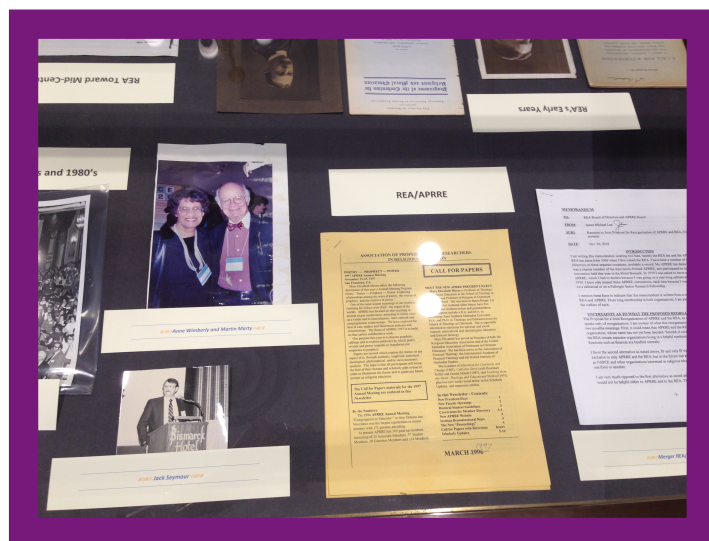
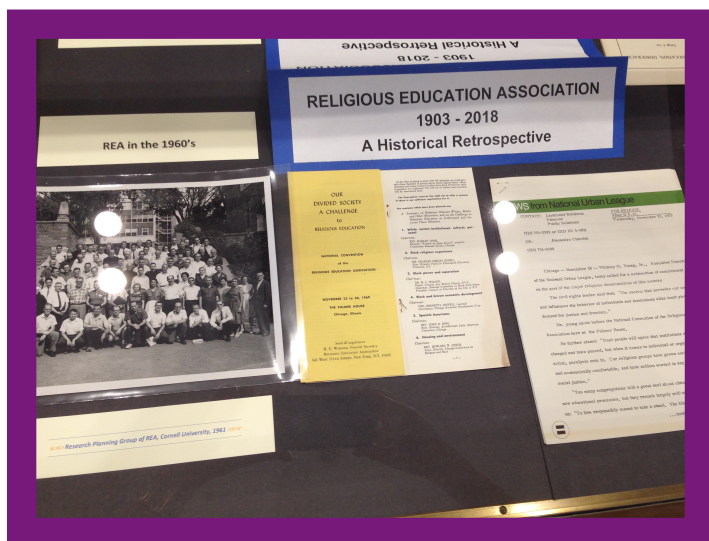
In the course of this transition we also reconsidered some past practices with an eye to improving security and privacy of your data. For example, last year we allowed members to register for the annual meeting or review the membership directory without using their password. We have decided that even though this privilege has not been abused in the past, it is just too wide open a door for bad actors who might use it as a way to get at your personal address and other information we hold about members. This means that our new system will be much more insistent that you know and use your password before any personal information is disclosed.

So when you next try to access the journal, visit the membership directory, register for a meeting, or change information in your membership profile, please don't be surprised if you are asked for a password. The first time this happens, just click the “lost your password” link and initiate a password reset to create a new password that you know and can save. Note that each time you initiate this process a new email with a new link will be sent to you and only the *most recent* of those links will be valid. If you have any trouble with this process, please just let us know by using the “report a problem” link at the bottom of any REA web page.

Use that same “report a problem” link to let us know about any surprises or frustrations you have with the new membership system or any other aspect of the REA website. Your feedback helps us build a better experience for all members.

## REA at APT

This year's bi-annual [Association of Practical Theology](#) meeting was held at Yale Divinity School in April, and the REA Historian, Dennis Gunn, put together a wonderful exhibit of materials from the [REA archives, which are held at Yale](#). Thank you, Dennis, for your interest in and commitment to preserving and communicating REA's historic work!





## Resources

In this issue of E-REACH we want to highlight the list of journals in which members regularly publish. The field of religious education is not always as well known as we might hope in academic settings, and reading and citing research from these journals is an important way to continue the conversation and expand its visibility.

It is vital to remember that in addition to our own excellent journal, Religious Education, there are many other journals in the scholarly conversation. Most of these journals work hard to be useful for practitioners as well. If you publish in a journal which is not on this list, please let our networking coordinator (Mary Hess) know, and she will add it to our resource page.

- British Journal of Religious Education
- The Interfaith Observer
- International Journal of Children's Spirituality
- Journal of Adult Theological Education
- Journal of Childhood and Religion
- Journal of Christian Education in Korea (this journal is published in both English and Korean, here is a guide for contributors in English)
- Journal of Religious Leadership
- Journal of Research on Christian Education
- Lifelong Faith journal (this one is no longer publishing, but has fabulous archives)
- Practical Matters
- Religion & Education
- Teaching Theology and Religion (Wabash Center journal)

We also would like to highlight a number of podcasts — digital audio resources which ask questions and support dialogues that may be of interest to our members. Again, if you have podcasts you love that you think our members would enjoy, please send them to our networking coordinator, Mary Hess.

- AlterGuild (young Christian clergy engaging current issues)
- CounterStories (a podcast produced by and for people of color and everyone else)
- The Hogwarts Chaplain (an Episcopal scholar/priest who engages current issues through the Harry Potter universe)
- JudaismUnbound (young Jewish leaders retrieving/reinventing Jewish practices for today)
- OnBeing (an independent non-profit public life and media initiative which pursues deep thinking and social courage, moral imagination and joy, to renew inner life, outer life, and life together)
- The Religious Studies Project (an international collaborative enterprise producing weekly podcasts with leading scholars on the social-scientific study of religion)

## Member news

**Lucinda Huffaker**, our executive secretary, is retiring from the Yale Divinity School as of September 1st. We welcome the news, as she now has well deserved time for relaxation — and more room for us!

**Mary Hess** was appointed to the [National Advisory Council of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men](#).

REA Board member **HyeRan Kim-Cragg** announces her latest book, [Interdependence: A Postcolonial Feminist Practical Theology](#) (Pickwick).

**Jonathan LeMaster Smith** successfully defended his dissertation — “Haunted Rural Landscapes: A Christian Pedagogical Response to Rural Deindustrialization” — at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, and is now Director of Congregational Ministry at Oak Hill United Methodist Church in North Carolina.

**Annie Lockhart-Gilroy** joined the faculty of Phillips Theological Seminary as [Assistant Professor of Christian Education and Practical Theology](#).

**Joshua Lund-Whitler** successfully defended his dissertation — “Making Disciples, Constructing Selves: A Narratival-Developmental Approach to Identity and its Implications for the Theology, Pedagogy, and Praxis of the Present-Day Church in the United States” — at Boston College’s School of Theology and Ministry, and continues on in his position as Executive Director of the [Walker Center for Ecumenical Exchange](#).

Past REA presidents **Mai-Ahn Le Tran** and **Mary Hess** have been appointed to the [Faculty Development Advisory Committee of the Association of Theological Schools](#).



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

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*Photo of Emily Peck-McClain*, courtesy of Wesley Seminary