

Mary Hess / Networking Coordinator

29 October 2018

Decisions / Action steps

- Act on proposal to move the 2021 meeting to a summer date
- Act on proposal to change governance structure
- Applaud Tenseg for their work
- Consider the challenges of supporting academic disciplines

Overall report

For this November 2018 report, I'm continuing the practice of following the elements of the contract I have with the REA.

By way of general numbers, note that right now we have 1114 email contacts in our database (a net increase of 59 from March), of which 394 are active members (a net increase of 3 from March). We seem to be "holding our own" in general membership terms, but are by no means growing appreciably.

Area 1: Help to engage members through social media

- Utilize social media to inform, announce, and remind membership of pertinent REA business and updates

In this area I have sent out regular e-lets, timed to specific kinds of issues (eREACH available, hotel deadline approaching, etc.). I have worked to populate our website and Facebook site with pertinent information as it arises. So far I have not been successful in igniting any sustained conversation in any of our social media. Instead these media function primarily as information links.

eREACH: I believe that our newsletter has the most reach of anything we do in terms of communication, and so I have focused my time here. We now publish it on a regular schedule (January, April, July and October), with a mix of news which generally includes something from our president and/or program chair, information about association members, religious education resources that are freely available, and other information that I believe is pertinent. I am *always* seeking pieces for e-REACH, and would appreciate anything Board members might share for publication. Kudos to our president, Mualla, for consistently sending me news and photos!

Website: I have been updating our website as necessary. Given the sprawling and participatory nature of this organization's leadership, it is easy to make mistakes – please pay specific attention to your own data on our website and let me know where it needs to be updated.

As is usual, our website saw a spike in activity just prior to and during the November meeting. Other posts consist of openings in the academy, calls for papers for various meetings, announcements of research reports, and member information (for example, sharing news that our president Dr. Selçuk would be speaking in DC). I continue to add "portal-type" resources to

the resources page. We currently follow more than 60 related scholarly and practice organizations (see our glossary page: <http://www.religiouseducation.net/glossary>).

I will repeat something I wrote here in March, and that is that I would very much like to showcase more scholarly substance on our site. I would very much appreciate your insight into how to make that section of our website more effective. What we really need to do is find a way for programs to make it a practice to send us information as they push it out. Frankly, I'm not sure how connected any academic programs feel to us? In the past we have faculty members from these schools who were deeply involved in our association, but I fear that much of that participation has subsided. I urge the Academic Disciplines standing committee to consider strategic initiatives in this area.

At the moment the most active working group on our website is the "Religion and Education" working group which has emerged as a collaboration between the previous "Schools" working group, and the Religion and Education Collaborative (<http://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/partners/rec/>). The Catholic Community of Practice (<https://religiouseducation.net/practice/catholic>) has also begun to be more active, with a specific page and blog posts.

Facebook: The largest "spike" in Facebook activity we've had since my last report occurred in relation to a job opening post I placed there. That post reached 418 people. Currently we have 565 "likes" for our page, which means that that is the potential immediate audience for our posts there, with more "reach" as people share information outward. This is an increase of 32 from my last report. We are not currently paying for any promotion at Facebook.

Twitter: We currently have 239 followers, which is a net increase of 6 since my last report, and we are following 95 people/organizations, which is a small increase of 3 since my last report. I have a hard time discerning our impact in Twitter because of all of our communication outlets, it's the one I spend the least time with. We not currently paying for any promotion at Twitter.

Vimeo: Our video stream is held at Vimeo, and the analytics report that we've had 47 plays since March, with 2 watched through to the end. It might be interesting to note that the region most watching our videos is Toronto, Ontario. Most people come to our site via desktop computer. Our most watched videos remain the following: Willie James Jennings, Emilie Townes, and the lightning round from 2010 (I have no idea why that one was watched so much!).

- Oversee development and integration of technical networking resources/digital tools

Most of the development and integration work done by *Tenseg* (the technology group with whom we contract for technical support) since March has centered around developing a new membership management tool. I'm excited by how well our new system is working, and how much easier it is to navigate and use our member data.

Tenseg has also been working with us on finding ways to adhere to the new GDPR rules (General Data Protection Regulation) that are emerging in the European context. The new membership management tool has given us more flexibility in building in what we need, to follow those regulations. We will likely need to change some of our current practices.

Finally, I would remind the Board that *Tenseg* has created a set of lovely pages to help us track various kinds of data with regard to our membership:

<http://www.religioeducation.net/scripts/membership/overview.php>

(use the password apprrre) and the annual meeting:

<http://www.religioeducation.net/scripts/annualmeeting/trends/chart.php>

Please take some time to browse these sites and think about any questions and insights this data might raise for you. But please – don't share the links beyond the board, and especially not the password, as these charts contain data private to our organization. The table “number of meetings attended since 2005” is particularly pertinent for identifying potential leaders.

Area 2: Networking

- Develop ways to increase REA presence with other organizations and entities (i.e., links, mailing list, partnerships, resources)

I remain convinced that we need to develop ways to support our members in becoming “evangelists” for our association in their own local venues. Please continue to use the FAQ page: <https://religioeducation.net/faq>, and we are happy to send you brochures (or find ways for you to print them locally) whenever you need them.

- Promote annual meeting by creating/distributing flyers, researching local contacts, contacting denominations

We are now working on the website and conference flyer for the 2019 meeting, and working with Hanan to think about how to network in the Toronto area. The University of Haifa has a branch there, and I am hopeful that might be one source of networking assistance.

- Produce electronic newsletter or alternative regular communication with members

See my notes previously in the report.

- Monitor and respond to web feedback, inquiries, and suggestions from members and visitors

This is an ongoing process. We continue to receive various kinds of queries and I try to be as efficient, direct, and friendly as possible in these inquiries.

- Respond to inquiries and other communication on behalf of the association

Here again I try to be as efficient, direct and friendly as possible.

Area 3: REA website

- Create audience specific resources to engage members (*en masse* and “networks”) and other interested parties in RE and REA

This is not an area I've done much with these past six months (aside from eREACH), instead focusing more of my attention on various planning/governance issues having to do with the association.

- Develop use of social media tools and web-conferencing

I have been experimenting with Zoom as a way to hold and record interviews for eREACH. It has proven to be more technically difficult than I expected, but it is a tool that we have used for holding electronic meetings – and for that use it has worked quite well, allowing our international board members to attend steering committee meetings, for example.

- Oversee video and photo capture of events, meeting sessions and plenaries for the purpose of providing web resources for members and outreach

This task is a labor-intensive one during the November meeting. I will be working hard to capture as much as I can of the meeting.

- Manage intellectual property issues

As noted in the past, I remain careful to choose images for e-REACH that we ourselves have taken, or that are CC-licensed. There have been no intellectual property issues raised since my last report. I believe our journal editor's clarifications in eREACH have been helpful to members.

- Update and manage annual meeting's online resources (papers, resources, plenaries, etc);
- Identify and post positions, fellowships, and funding opportunities in RE to the website

As already noted, I continue to work on this part of the website, editing it every week and sometimes on a daily basis. At times I feel like our website news stream is only about openings! But I do work hard to get position and other opportunities posted as quickly as I can, because I know that people find this part of the web very important. I would appreciate any feedback you might like to offer so that I can hone my curation to match more clearly the will of the board.

It should be noted that our Amazon bookstore is experiencing problems (in part because we lost our nonprofit status briefly), and I have not yet been able to get it back into functionality. It has never produced income for us, and I'm not convinced that it has raised much visibility for our field. I am currently searching for alternatives.

Area 4: Board participation and support

- Attend all Board and Steering Committee meetings as *ex officio* member, and advise Board decisions related to web-based networking and technology

I have been present for eight board meetings: November 2014 (which was my first in this role), the March 2015 retreat, the November 2015 meeting in Atlanta, our March 2016 retreat, the November 2016 meeting in Pittsburgh, the March 2017 Board retreat, the November 2017 meeting in St. Louis, and the March 2018 Board retreat. I have been present for all but two of the steering committee meetings. At this point I feel good about what I'm doing, and look forward to hearing your feedback.

- Conduct annual review, evaluation and analysis of networking initiatives

I believe this report functions as that review.

- Identify technology needs and develop a technology budget for each fiscal year

I am thoroughly grateful for the wisdom and negotiating abilities of *Tenseg*, who regularly help us to negotiate better A/V contracts with hotels, as well as competently handling our membership management system. As noted in my proposal to move to a summer meeting, this area of our budget continues to be quite challenging. Large conference hotels charge a high premium for using their technology. I believe we would be better served – both in terms of efficiency and cost – by moving our meetings to a university venue.

- Support the Program Chair in designing and implementing outreach and support for the Annual Meeting (e.g., webinar, blog, or virtual or social media session prior to the Meeting)

Kathy has worked hard to get appropriate resources for us into the conference website for this year. We have begun the process for next year with Hanan, and there will be a live conference site by the end of our annual meeting to which to direct people for the CFP (the Board needs first to approve the call).

- Provide technology support for Board meetings
- Assist w/implementation of Board decisions
- Participate in long-term envisioning and planning with the Board to determine how best to accomplish the association's mission

I believe that the association-wide survey data remains a crucial resource in which to thoroughly immerse ourselves. We have not utilized that data to the extent that we could. The Board really needs to delegate someone to follow up with this data. Further I believe that the field of religious education, more generally construed, continues to fragment and lose ground in academic settings (at least in the US). The Board needs to be much more proactive in providing a vision and action steps for engaging these challenges.

- Develop evaluation process for annual meetings, implement, and compile results for Board

This year we will once again use Sched to gather evaluation data. Given the huge fall-off in participation at last November's meeting, we are returning to offering Amazon gift cards through a random drawing of evaluation responses.

You will be able to see this year's data here:

<https://www.religiouseducation.net/scripts/annualmeeting/feedback/> (PIN is apprre)