



Reflecting on an idea tree
Highlights of our November 2-4 meeting
Details for DC
and more inside

From our president, Mualla Selçuk

Dear friends and colleagues,

When Mary, our network coordinator, asked me what I would like to share with you through this October issue of E-Reach, I had an inner feeling to write about the idea tree which I created long ago. The idea tree was an attempt to illustrate the theoretical foundations of teaching religion in a diverse society. Theoretical foundations are important because if we are going to justify the role of RE in a plural context, we need to show that RE can help us understand the self and others, maintain meaningful relations, and gain a more profound understanding of becoming fully human.

As illustrated below, I argue there are five forms of teaching respect that seem necessary for the foundations of religious education meant to be open to diversity. They include teaching respect for understanding human beings, teaching respect for different thoughts, teaching respect for freedom, teaching respect for anything moral, and teaching respect for cultural heritage.

This idea tree usually speaks to my students' imagination, cultivates their minds toward the question of how our faith could be a source of inspiration to look at others not with a feeling of superiority but with eyes of respect. Together we drop the word respect with all its false and familiar connotations and explore what it really means. We find that respect does not mean following what everyone does, being obedient to what the superiors want,

or passively transferring the norms. We also realize that respect is not a matter of conforming to social norms or approving them. Rather, in our search, respect reveals itself in understanding, recognition of others, and appreciation of the differences.

My original intention was, after introducing the idea tree, to write about its practical implications in my teaching experience. However, I gave up the idea because that would have been just one contextual example which would lack the diverse scope and exchange needed if we want our ideas and educational practices to truly flourish and achieve the potential to enlighten our shared humanity. Once again, writing this column

reminded me that if we are to carry out our responsibilities of transforming education, we, as people of different faith, need each other. We need to come together, rethink our assumptions, and renew our desire for creating brave spaces on how to deal with our tough problems. Racial strangeness, national and international conflicts, differences of sex, of culture, of religion, and many other causes of exclusions are our shared problems. I believe when we collaborate, we will gain deeper insights into the behaviors and attitudes we hope to offer to the world which, undoubtedly, will affect our future, and the future of our children and grandchildren.

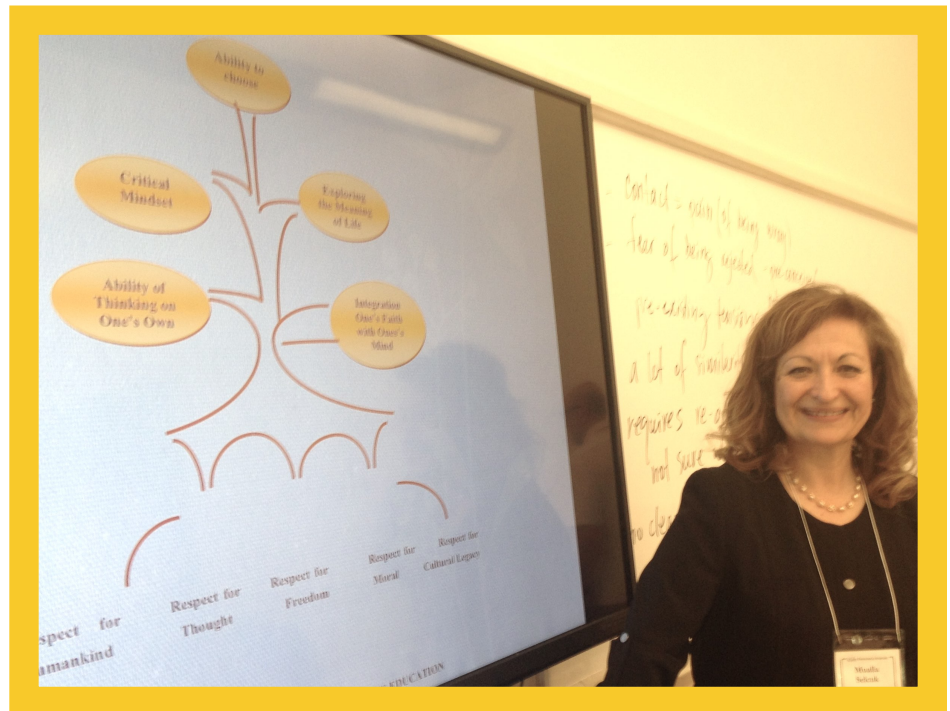
I am fully aware that I need you and you need me. Therefore, I invite you to our meeting in November. My heartfelt gratitude to each one of you for the spirit with which you rise to every annual meeting from the first day to the last.

Extending your invitation with Rumi's words are perhaps most appropriate:

“Out beyond ideas of wrong doing
and right doing there is a field.

I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass
the world is too full to talk about.”



From our program chair, Kathy Winings

As you read this latest issue of eReach, the Annual Meeting is less than a month away. I hope you have registered and are anticipating it eagerly. As I reflect on the Meeting and finalize my own preparations, I would like to encourage you to do two things as part of your preparation for the program. Both suggestions stem from my reflective experiences over this last year.

Let me start with a definition. What is “white normativity”? Michael Morris puts it this way:

"White normativity operates not to position whites as the best at everything—the ideal—but as the most human. It endangers the fabric of our multiracial society, not by trumpeting white superiority, but by using real or perceived differences between whites and others to undermine the humanity of minority groups. It treats the supposed strengths of minority groups, as much as the stereotypical weaknesses ascribed to them, as evidence that the members of such groups are not “people” in the same way whites are."

During this past year, I have been working on my institution’s satellite campus in Maryland, within what is called “the Beltway” because of its proximity to Washington, D.C.. What makes this campus unique in the Unification Church context is that 100% of the students are African-American. I am generally the only white woman on campus and often the only one in seminary leadership within our denominational family. This context certainly contributed to my initial thoughts about the theme for this year. But after working on this campus for the past year, it has become clear how strongly this environment has challenged me to reflect on who I am. More importantly, this time has challenged me to question my own role in maintaining white normativity.

I was accustomed to looking at normativity either from the perspective of being a woman who witnessed others maintain a specific situated normativity as somehow universal, or as a social justice-minded white woman who did not believe that she could possibly perpetuate racism. Yet I have come to realize that it is not so straightforward or simple as that. When I started this journey, I believed I was not implicated in maintaining white normativity and did not contribute to its continued presence because I was aware of it. After all, I believed that I too had experienced oppression through the imposition of a specific form of gender normativity. Therefore, I was sympathetic and deeply aware of the problem and was trying to “fix” the problem at least in my corner of the theological world. After reading the article by Kathy Hytten and Ameer Adkins, “Thinking through a Pedagogy of Whiteness,” I had to admit that I have not unpacked some of the basic assumptions of whiteness. Therefore I have not really seen myself as “white” and so have not recognized the ways that I have benefited from “the unearned privileges that accrue



to that identity” (Hyttten, Amee, 440). This realization was enough to knock me off my feet, so to speak.

With further reflection, I have also come to agree with Hyttten and Adkins when they say that in order to disrupt the power of whiteness as a situated and powerful form of imposed normativity, that “we must learn to listen to others and to some extent, see ourselves through others’ eyes” (441). I have had to conclude that until now, I have spent more time talking about how aware I am of the presence of white racism than I have listening to how I am perceived by others and reflecting on the many ways that I have benefited from that essential identity as a white woman. Since these initial realizations, I have been able to hear and discern new meanings from my students’ discussions in class and in their assignments. I have also found myself stepping back in order to hear what is *not* being said as well as what *is* being said, and to take time to reflect and digest what is unfolding in front of me.

Therefore, one request that I have for my white colleagues in particular, is to use the time between now and the Annual Meeting to reflect on the specific situated forms of normativity that are imposed in your context, and in particular, how racialized oppression is institutionalized within them. I also hope that we might reflect together upon ways to resist such oppression as a scholar and/or a practitioner of religious education.



For my colleagues of color, I ask that you consider whether and how you might want to share in this discussion at our upcoming meeting. The REA is trying to create “brave spaces” within this meeting, but we are deeply aware of how challenging such a process can be. Last year we began to develop opportunities for deeper encounter in our meeting. This year let’s continue to try to think “outside of the box” of our standard patterns, and consider ways in which we might encourage and support each other in this work.

While I realize that what I am asking can be personally challenging in myriad ways, I hope that each of us might pause to reflect in this manner. I am compelled to continue my own reflection because of the ways my eyes have been opened.

Secondly, as part of this reflection in my own context, I have begun taking a hard look at my course syllabi to assess the degree of white normativity that is being perpetuated in my courses. As a part of this process, I have considered the resources, the voices that I consistently bring into the classroom. This has challenged me to ask some critical questions: Do my students see themselves reflected in the sources they are required to read? Do my assignments allow for what Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens describe as

“authentic engagement with regard to issues of identity, oppression, power, and privilege” (Arao, Clemens, 139.)? More importantly, is my classroom a brave space in which students are free to take risks to express themselves honestly and authentically? Even further, are we creating a brave space where specific forms of normativity can be challenged, a painful task because it requires us to “[give] up a former condition in favour of a new way of seeing things” (Arao, Clemens, 141).

What I saw in my syllabi was my own feeling of sameness and my own sense of safety and comfort. My basic resources reflected my white culture. I have begun to rewrite my syllabi and to ask my colleagues about new resources that are more reflective of multiple voices and inclusive themes. I ask that you too take time to review at least one of your course syllabi or educational plans. Critically examine the resources you are asking students to read. Reflect on the themes and the key questions that you raise in the

course. Do your students hear their own voices reflected in the resources? Are you creating a brave space with the questions, themes and direction of the course? Will your white students risk the pain and discomfort they might feel as they fully and honestly engage broader course content? Will your students of color find support and encouragement to take their own experiences seriously? And if this is not the case, what might you do next semester? What is possible?

I understand that this is just the beginning of my journey and that it will be ongoing. This is a process. I

am the product of many years of entrenched concepts and a culture that has been shaped over centuries. I have come to see that there are many different levels of awareness and acceptance when it comes to challenging white normativity. I’ve taken baby steps. But by persevering and a willingness to learn, reflect, make mistakes and continue the journey, I have begun to see change. Change in myself. Change in my students. Even change among those around me. Such change is critical and imperative. Come in November and contribute to brave space for change.

Arao, Brian, Clemens, Kristi. (2013) *“From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice”* in *The Art of Effective Facilitation*. New York: Stylus Publishing.

Hytten, Kathy, Adkins, Ameer. (2001). *“Thinking through a Pedagogy of Whiteness”* in *Educational Theory*. Vol. 51, No. 4, Fall 2001.

Michael Morris. (2016). “Standard White: Dismantling White Normativity,” 104 *Cal. L. Rev.* 949. Available at: <http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/californialawreview/vol104/iss4/3>



Pre-conference excursion



In alignment with the 2018 conference theme, “Beyond White Normativity: Creating Brave Spaces,” the 2018 conference will commence with a pre-conference excursion on Thursday, November 1st to one of the brave spaces established in September 2016, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. The excursion will include careful observations of the D.C culture as we travel from the Hyatt Regency Reston (1800 Presidents Street, Reston, Virginia, 20190) to the museum (located at 1400 Constitution Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C.) via the Metro rail. Participants will purchase subway passes at the entry station for

\$5.35. Entrance to the museum is free. You will have over 4 hours to explore more than 36,000 artifacts at the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture. Following the museum experience participants may stay downtown for dinner, or return to the conference hotel. This special “Beyond White Normativity” excursion will be limited to the first 30 people who sign up. To sign up log into [our meeting’s Sched](#) and choose this pre-conference on your own schedule.

Exciting line-up of speakers for November!

We have an exciting line-up of conference speakers, and are so pleased to present the following:

Dr. Shelly Tochluk, Professor of Education, Mount Saint Mary's University, will be speaking on "Meeting the Challenges of Normativity."

An educator, with a background in psychology, Dr. Tochluk spent ten years as a researcher, counselor, and teacher in California’s public schools. She now trains teachers to work with Los Angeles’ diverse school population. Her personal dedication to confronting issues of race developed first through her participation with UCLA’s NCAA Division-1 All-American Track and Field 4X400 meter relay team and later through her inner city teaching experiences.



She currently works with AWARE-LA (Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere-Los Angeles), where she collaborated in the creation of a workshop series that leads white people into a deeper understanding of their personal relationship to race, white privilege, and systemic racism.



Rev. Dr. Gregory Ellison, II, Associate Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling, Candler School of Theology at Emory University, will be leading us through “Engaging in Fearless Dialogue.”

Rev. Dr. Ellison joined the Candler faculty in 2009. His teaching draws primarily from his work with the organization he founded called Fearless Dialogues, a non-profit organization that creates unique spaces for unlikely partners to have hard, heartfelt conversations on taboo subjects like racism, classism, and community violence. Ellison’s research focuses on caring with marginalized populations, pastoral care as social activism, and 20th and 21st century mysticism. He is the author of *Cut Dead But Still Alive: Caring for African American Young Men*, *Fearless Dialogues: The Civil Rights Movement of the 21st Century* and is working on *Anchored in the Current: The Eternal Wisdom of Howard Thurman in a Changing World*, for Westminster John Knox Press.

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Dr. Mehmet Salih Sayilgan, Visiting Assistant Professor of Islamic and Interreligious Studies at Wesley Theological Seminary, and Louisville Postdoctoral Fellow

Dr. Jennifer Awes Freeman, Assistant Professor of Theology and the Arts, United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities

Dr. Mark Hearn, Director of Contextual Education, Assistant Clinical Professor of Contextual Education & Ministry, Seattle University School of Theology and Ministry

Callid Keefe-Perry, PHD student in Practical Theology and Religious Education, Boston University School of Theology

Our final plenary will focus on “Creating Brave Spaces.” Four faculty and practitioners who have been working to create brave and diverse spaces of encounter, in the classroom and within our faith communities, will lead us through a working session in which all of us will be able to look at how we structure syllabi, workshops, and courses so as to look for ways to create these powerful, courageous spaces in our own contexts. We invite you to bring a syllabus or an outline of a workshop, study series, or course with you to aid in the discussion.

Sunday morning special session

Sunday morning at the Annual Meeting is a time set aside for meetings of work groups, communities of practice, or other affinity groups, committee meetings, and special programs. This year we are happy to offer a special session on Environmental Racism, Environmental Justice on Sunday from 9:00-10:30 AM.

Environmental racism is the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on communities of color. US environmentalism has been overwhelmingly white, a situation hindering the broad collaborative action that is crucial amidst current environmental threats. How has white normativity shaped actions to secure the welfare of the environment? Rev. Dr. Faith Harris will lead a session examining characteristics and examples of environmental racism, based on her work with Virginia Interfaith Power and Light, the Green Seminary Certification of Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, the Governor’s Advisory Council for Environmental Justice, and her grassroots organizing and seminary teaching.



Preparing for our meeting

Our association has always stressed our commitment to collegial engagement. A key way in which we demonstrate that commitment is to read RIG (research interest group) papers ahead of the meeting. Papers for the RIGs are now available [in Sched](#) at our [meeting website](#). You can find them by going to the session you want to attend, and looking for the live link [paper] in each abstract after the paper's title.

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, please go ahead and make a reservation and then contact our executive secretary, [Lucinda Huffaker](#), as soon as you can.

Washington, DC is a lovely area to explore in detail, and the District maintains [a richly detailed tourist website](#), full of information, free maps, and many other resources.

There will be space available for you to display various materials you wish to bring to the attention of our association members. We cannot promise consistent supervision of these displays, however, so please be alert to the chance that materials may walk away — and be thoughtful about leaving your colleagues' materials safely displayed for other people to enjoy as well.



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.

Lucinda Huffaker is looking for volunteers who are willing to give an hour or two of their time during the meeting to help us coordinate and manage various elements of our time together. We need people to take tickets at the door of meals, for instance, and to help direct people to various sessions. Volunteers are needed to support our materials display space, and to welcome people to the reception area. Please consider giving an hour or two to our shared work in this meeting. Please [email Lucinda](#) to volunteer.

Please send [Elena Soto, our Association recording secretary](#), the names of any REA members who have died since we last met, as well as anyone you know who is moving into retirement. We will recognize them during our evening banquet.

ALLLM - a related learning organization

This year we are excited to have entered into a new relationship with the [Association of Leaders in Lifelong Learning for Ministry](#). As a Related Learning Organization with REA their members enjoy special shared rates for membership and conferences, and they have several specific sessions at this meeting. Their opening reception, on Thursday evening, features Dr. Diana Butler Bass. REA members, due to this special relationship, can register for the reception (which includes food) on the meeting registration form. If you neglected to do so when you registered, you may still be able to if you contact [Lucinda Huffaker](#) immediately.

Dr. Bass is an award-winning author and internationally known public speaker and thought leader on issues of spirituality, religion, culture, and politics. She has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, PBS, CBS, and FOX, has been interviewed on numerous radio programs, including shows on NPR, CBC, and Sirius XM, and has work featured in numerous print and online newspapers and magazines including Time, USA Today, and the Los Angeles Times. From 1995-2000, she wrote a weekly column for the New York Times Syndicate. She was a founding blogger for both Beliefnet and Huffington Post religion. Her bylines include the Washington Post and Atlantic.com. She has preached and taught in hundreds of church, college, and conference venues in North America and beyond.

Sign up for your breakout sessions!

All of the sessions for our upcoming annual meeting are now detailed within the [schedule at our website](#). Even if you signed up for sessions earlier in the fall, please take a look at the schedule now because there have been significant changes. Make sure that you are signed up for the sessions you want to attend. The papers, outlines, and other resources for breakout sessions are available now, and we urge you to prepare well in advance of the meeting by reading the papers. Not sure what Sched is? Take a look at our page about [selecting sessions with Sched](#).

Consent agenda in use for the business meeting

The Board has decided to continue to use a consent agenda at the Association's annual business meeting. A consent agenda is a process whereby items which generally do not elicit much conversation are presented to the membership in advance of the meeting (you will find them on the conference website, in the business meeting post the week of the conference). Then, at the meeting itself, these items are clustered together in a format that makes clear that they are on the consent agenda. The chair of the meeting inquires of the membership if there are any items they would like moved from the consent agenda to the regular agenda, thus allowing for discussion of them. Any member

may ask for something to be moved, and one request is all that is necessary for that movement. Any items remaining on the consent agenda are adopted in whole as they are presented.

This is a mechanism that makes it possible to move through items more quickly, thus creating more room for substantial consideration of items that truly require discussion. At this business meeting the slate of nominees and various staff reports will be placed on the consent agenda. If you would like to nominate someone not on the slate, or if there are any questions raised by one of the reports that you would like addressed before voting to accept them, please respond to the chair's request at the meeting and ask that the item be moved to the regular agenda.

Resources

Community, Education, and De-Colonization for Canada's 150th celebration.

Last year Canada celebrated its 150th year since confederation, and over the year large numbers of organizations created materials for learning. Now those materials have been collated into one website that is free and available for use. Many of these resources are useful and evocative for many settings beyond Canada.

The Interfaith Observer, an online journal, has a huge set of essays, curriculum materials, and other resources for engaging and celebrating interfaith work in preparation for the World Parliament of Religions.

The Media Education lab has made available [a richly curated site](#), full of learning exercises and resources for learning about, dissecting, and engaging propaganda: From the site: "**Mind Over Media: Analyzing Contemporary Propaganda** resulted from a collaboration between Renee Hobbs and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in developing educational programming and resources to support the special exhibition, State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda. At the Museum, David Klevan led the website initiative. At the Media Education Lab, Renee Hobbs, Kaylen Shimoda, Frank Baker, Jonathan Friesem, Sandy McGee and Lili Schlessner contributed to the development of the program."

GlobalOneness Project, an initiative of Kalliopeia Foundation, is committed to the exploration of cultural, environmental, and social issues. The project houses a rich library of free multimedia stories comprised of award-winning films, photo essays, and articles, accompanied by companion curriculum for teachers.

The UCC makes available for free its **Sacred Conversations to End Racism** curricular materials.

The **Religion & American Culture Project** has begun an initiative to curate and catalog "papers of sessions from professional meetings. These papers are stand-alone projects (not based on ongoing research projects) that deal with a significant topic or book in the field of religion in North America. The purpose of these Significant Sessions

is to curate and distribute important conversations that take place in conferences and meetings."

In August the Yale Youth Ministry Initiative hosted Dr. James Smith on the topic of "education as formation." The [video of the lecture](#) is now available online

Member news

Julie Lytle has joined the faculty of Bexley Seabury in Chicago, as [Associate Professor of Educational Leadership and Director of Distributive and Lifelong Learning Initiatives](#).

Lakisha Lockhart, Wornom innovation grant awardee, has been named as a ["millennial womanist to watch"](#) by the Black Theology Project.

Jennifer Moe notes that current and former members of the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary community are invited to dine together during our annual meeting Friday evening, Nov. 2 at [Clyde's of Reston](#), which is in walking distance from the Hotel. She adds that they will meet there at 8:30 pm. Please RSVP to [Jennifer Moe](#) at or before Wednesday October 31 so she can get an accurate headcount for reservations.

Emily Peck McClain, one of our Horizons series authors, recently published [We Pray with Her: Encouragement for All Women Who Lead](#), along with Danylle Trexler, Shannon Sullivan, J. Paige Boyer, and Jen Tyler.

Graham Rossiter announces a new book, *Life to the Full: The Changing Landscape of Contemporary Spirituality -- Implications for Catholic School Religious Education*, [available for free online](#). The book is focused specifically on religious education in the Australian Catholic school context. As part of the publishing strategy, the book is linked with [complementary audiovisual and study materials](#) that are related specifically to most of its chapters.



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

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Fall leaves, Mary Hess.

Image Tree, Mualla Selçuk.

National Museum of African American History and Culture, rexhammock

Photos of speakers taken from their websites.