



Reflecting on REA2018 annual meeting
Resources to share
Memorials and membership news
much more inside!

From our Networking Coordinator, Mary Hess

In this first issue of E-REACH for 2019 I would like to take a moment to remind people of something Elizabeth Conde Frazier said back in 2016 at our annual meeting. Reflecting on the brokenness of many of our institutions she noted that [“it’s a dying structure, so start thinking about the institutions you want to have!”](#)

This past November's annual meeting was a difficult one in many ways — as you will read in the essays from our outgoing president and incoming president — and I hope that as you read this issue of our newsletter you will keep track of any ideas that arise for practical ways to encourage our association to keep moving into deeper and more complex, reflective and engaged relationship.

In the following pages you will find notes on the meeting, photos from our gathering, announcements of upcoming events, free resources to share, and much more. We are an association of people who come from many differing contexts and experiences. Engaging such diversity is not simple or easy, but if we stay present to each other and remain vulnerable, we can continue to learn and to grow.

Different Faiths, Common Aims

by Mualla Selçuk, Outgoing REA President

On my way back from our annual meeting, I thought about how I could deliver home the message of the meeting and more importantly how I could spread the thoughtful presentations, discussions, and deliberations our members had. A number of questions ran in my mind: In the context of the problems we discussed in our meeting, what do we intend to do? How do we contribute, as an organization, to the art of living together in a diverse community? What better conversation could we have with encounter as an organization? How do we activate our shared capacity to help people live their life fully and reflect faithfully?



As I was thinking about these questions, I remembered a proposal that was raised at one of our board meetings a few years ago: setting up a common homepage or a space here at E-REACH and sharing our research. We are now perhaps more in need of each other to collaborate in formulating responses to the above questions. And this made me think whether we should set another common goal for our meetings. What if we draft a common resolution at the end of annual meetings rising on the discussions we share at the meeting and reflecting our organization's commitment to live, to educate, and to teach together? A declaration to build connections, to encounter on a ground of active faith in a caring society. Such a statement will be inspired by strong ideas from our research and scholarship and by ethical policies drawn

from our faith. And it will demonstrate how we do things differently in equity, diversity, and inclusivity. I feel such an endeavor to draft a common statement will also feed back our academic work by encouraging collaborative research across frontiers and ultimately contributing to wider and more robust academic networks.

I believe that thinking about this proposition is very timely given the increased urgency to work actively toward living together in the increasingly polarized social and political climate surrounding all of us. At the same time, this effort will be an unequivocally strong example of how we think, search, teach, and learn together.

Making this proposal and raising the question of whether we will be capable of carrying out such a common initiative, I wanted to share with you a personal anecdote which exemplifies how our togetherness and eagerness to work toward a common goal shaped an early career researcher's career.

I attended our 2014 meeting in Chicago with Betül Zengin, then my PhD student and currently colleague. Betül found herself in a community with a deep sense of being together in the name of God and in sincere commitment to solve the problems of our field. She encountered scholars sharing the common aim to create a clear perception of the purpose and scope of religious education. In one of the sessions Betül had an opportunity to talk with Dr. Virginia Lee from Garrett. Virginia showed great interest in Betül's search for meaning in teaching religion. Following Virginia's recommendation, Betül did some readings on theological thinking, and that was the game changer in her professional development. The work she encountered helped Betül formulate her main idea that teaching religion must be more than simply using existing approaches in the service of people or institutions. In her perspective, religious education should not only be a means by which teachers make a living but should rather be seen in a more meaningful way, indeed like a call, in which teachers could practice their faith with their students on a daily basis. What ought to be done in education, then, is to help teachers embrace their vocation of teaching with activity, participation, and involvement. This analysis changed Betül's research focus.



Initially she was interested in engaging teachers in working on student-centered curricula. But the inspiration from her REA experience led her to develop a project, titled Understanding as an Aim of Religious Education, where she saw teachers' reflection on their teaching as a central process in RE. Formulating and/or clarifying the aims of RE in a way to encourage teachers find meaning in what they were doing was the key.

For Betül, the field of RE was doing a very good job in transmission of knowledge but what about understanding? Might we have ignored the understanding component of

education? The ideals we have for teachers are attainable mostly for those who had reached a certain level of understanding. A person who has developed critical thinking, for instance, will not accept things just because they are told to do so. More specific guidance to teachers, seemed to her, was needed to clarify what RE was about.

Eventually she constructed her query: How can we combine content and method so that teacher education results in teachers acquiring the type of critical understanding we aim for?

Fortunate to be her supervisor, I can say that her research turned out to be a fascinating project. A project that investigates the ways philosophy and theology can cooperate and formulate the nature of understanding and thereby constitute principles for teaching religion. Her research offers perspectives relevant for contemporary discussions in RE, some of which I mention below:

- Understanding-focused RE is built on the connection between students and their lives.
- Understanding-focused RE argues that there is integrity between the act of “knowing” and our “actions” (with a strong emphasis on the concept of “phronesis”).
- Understanding-focused RE aims to support students to be open to others and to their ideas. It does not support categorical, bipolar conclusions (such as “right/wrong” or “false/true”), but rather it paves the way to grasp the meaning.

Dear REA friends and colleagues, I am sure your REA experiences are replete with such examples of your own. I am also aware that anecdotes may not always represent the norm. But who can argue against that such experiences are inspirational for all of us? So, if our togetherness helps each other learn and grow, can we work toward creating more platforms emphasizing our common aims?

Let me close my final E-Reach column as president by adding:

May God help us in our search for the field and achieve the best for our students for a faith which seeks understanding.

May our common endeavors open new horizons and serve mutual understanding in the world.

Learning from Our Work Together

By Kathy Winings, Incoming REA President



Happy New Year to all of our REA members and eReach readers. While a lot happened in 2018 for all of us, prime for me was the Annual Meeting that took place in Washington, D.C.. First, thank you to all who submitted papers, collaborative sessions, posters and to everyone who participated in the sessions. Your contributions helped make the Program that much richer. Certainly a highlight of the program was Dr. Greg Ellison, author of the book *Fearless Dialogues: A New Movement for Justice*, who led participants in a powerful interactive plenary session on Saturday morning. Working in small groups, Dr. Ellison led everyone through an introspective process that enabled us to see each other and ourselves with fresh eyes. Another special event was the pre-conference excursion to the National Museum of African American History on Thursday afternoon. The experience was both sobering and inspirational.

A special thank you to those who submitted evaluations for the Program. They are important and the Board takes them quite seriously. We have begun reading through the

evaluations and discussing what you have expressed so that we can learn from our missteps as well as note what worked well as we prepare for the 2019 Annual Meeting. I have been prayerfully reviewing all of the evaluations. As the Program Chair for the 2018 Meeting and now the President of REA, I want to say personally that I valued your comments and the heart with which they were offered. Because the issue of normativity and discrimination has been so close to my heart and has been an important dimension of my work for over twenty years, I want to offer my heartfelt and most sincere apologies to those participants who experienced personal and professional hurts and challenges in the first Plenary and in the Meeting in general.

Recognizing the sensitivity of the theme and the need to be collaborative, the Board and I spent the past year discussing, planning and refining the program. However, as those who have planned conferences can attest, missteps happen, mistakes are made and problems do arise through unintentional hurt. At the end of the day, it is my prayer that all of us can work together, as an Association and as researchers, scholars and practitioners, in our individual contexts to further scholarship and best practices around this theme. I believe we can be instrumental in awakening our colleagues, institutions and faith communities to the need to move beyond white normativity to create new spaces that dare to give greater voice to those who have not been heard.

We were fortunate that there were a number of excellent papers presented at the Meeting. They provided deep insights, ongoing questions and challenges to our institutions as well as intriguing examples of brave spaces that can be replicated in diverse contexts. In addition, the presenters represented a wide range of environments and voices. Those reviewing papers for the conference issue of the Journal will have a difficult task to select the papers that will be published.

As I begin this year as President, it is my prayer that I can serve the Association in such a way that will best support the valuable work of each and every one of you, help advance our discipline and Association, and demonstrate our genuine commitment to our Meeting theme. I want to offer gratitude and appreciation to Mualla Selçuk for all that she has done to serve and guide the Board and the Association this past year as President. Her wisdom and grace allowed all of us to become better educators and to consider how our Association can continue to develop and move into the future.

The Board is working on initiatives to address issues and suggestions raised in the Annual Meeting evaluations. One of the initiatives concerns developing a leadership structure that provides an effective way to maximize the contributions of diverse voices. Another concerns reducing the cost of the Annual Meeting so that more members can participate, which could involve meeting on university campuses and meeting at a different time of the year. In these and other initiatives, the Board will continue to make every effort to sustain the commitments of REA through its decisions and actions.

The new year begins with challenges, uncertainties and problems faced by people around the globe. At the same time, the new year also presents tremendous opportunities. As religious educators, practitioners and scholars, we are part of an exciting discipline that allows us to work with students, schools, faith communities and the public as they find

their voices, as they connect with their faith in new ways and as they come to see themselves and their possibilities with fresh eyes. A message that is central to our work is that we are interrelated and that we need each other. Dr. Martin Luther King expressed it well when he said, “In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men [and women] are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality.” So as we begin this new year, the Board and I hope that you will stay engaged with us so that we may continue to serve and support you more effectively in 2019. May this be a year filled with great blessings for you and your families.

Proceedings and Plenary Videos Available

As in the past, the REA makes available a print-ready version of all of the papers presented at the most recent annual meeting. You can [download the Proceedings](#) and use them in your teaching and research. We heartily recommend that you do so, as it helps to raise the visibility and impact of our field. This is a free resource, and one which seeks to contribute to the public elements of our Association’s mission.

We also work hard to ensure that we have video recordings of our plenaries. This year Dr. Ellison asked that his plenary not be shared, given the vulnerable nature of the discussion, but all of the rest of the plenaries (including the lightning round) are up at [our Vimeo site](#). We now have recordings that stretch all the way back to our 2009 meeting. You can watch [Emilie Townes](#), [Willie James Jennings](#), [Andrea Bieler](#), [Parker Palmer](#), [David Hansen](#), and many more!



REA Board Considering New Governance Proposals

As mentioned by our incoming president, the REA Board has been hard at work listening carefully to the feedback they have received — both from this most recent meeting, but also in the 2017 Association-wide survey. Building from that feedback the Board is working on sweeping changes to governance that include differentiating the association leadership — president, vice-president, secretary/treasurer — from the program leadership of our annual meetings. In the future the Board imagines moving to a process by which people from the Association can propose a theme and program chair, and Association members will be able to vote on a range of choices for a given meeting.

Along side of this move to enhance the ways in which members have input into meeting themes, the Board is developing a proposal for an Advisory council that will have a larger membership and that will explicitly connect structurally to our various diverse constituencies.

These proposals will come before the Association's membership in the next year. The Board welcomes feedback and ideas at any point along the way. Please do not hesitate to share your wisdom. Board member emails and other contact information is available on our webpage.

Memorials

Dr. Linda Jane Vogel died on November 17, 2017. She had retired from Garrett-Evangelical and continued to be active in her church and community leadership in Claremont, CA where she lived with her husband, Dwight. Linda's scholarship focused on adult education and the connections of liturgy and education. Linda was an ordained United Methodist deacon who connected the faith to everyday life. A faithful mentor for her PhD students, she helped them connect faith, justice, vocation, and care. As a colleague, she was supportive and committed. She helped a faculty live out its commitments. She was always the first voice and actor for inclusion.

Rev. Kathryn G. Brown died April 4, 2018. She was the General Secretary of Christian Education for the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon passed away in August of 2018. She was the first African-American woman ordained in the United Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), and in 1983 became the first African-American to earn the Doctor of Philosophy degree from Union Theological Seminary (NYC). She lectured nationally on theological and ethical topics and was the author or editor of numerous articles and seven books including *Katie's Canon: Womanism and the Soul of the Black Community* and *Black Womanist Ethics*.

Professor Emeritus Gary Chamberlain passed away on September 10, 2018. Dr. Chamberlain taught at Seattle University from 1979–2009. He was a faculty member and Past Chair in the Theology and Religious Studies Department and was a critical figure in the development and growth of the Environmental Studies Program. In 1980, he became the director of the Seattle University Master of Religious Education (SUMORE) program and held that position until 1988. Dr. Chamberlain also played a substantial role in the creation of the Institute for Theological Studies (ITS), which eventually gave birth to the School of Theology and Ministry.

Resources

In this issue we want to highlight some of the many video resources available for free use in various settings. Video is increasingly becoming an important component of learning events and many organizations are intentionally sharing their presentations into wider contexts through video. Here are just a few of the websites we recommend:

Videos for Change is a site which challenges young people from Years 7 to 12 to create a one-minute video on a social issue they feel passionate about. Past participants have covered issues such as social inclusion, racism, domestic violence, gender equality, LGBTQI rights, and bullying. The winning videos are posted in a freely accessible format [on their website](#).

KineticsLive is an information ministry that integrates theological reflection and practice, and uses dialogue as a catalyst for social change. Featuring leading voices from the academy, church and community their website offers a treasure chest of free videos of presentations made at their various meetings and conferences.

The **Transforming Chaplaincy Project** hosts a rich and diverse assortment of multimedia and other resources aimed at engaging issues that arise in chaplaincy work.

Durham University's **"Common Awards Research"** project was created to explore new possibilities for collaborative research – for thinking together about the future of ministry and mission, and about the challenges and possibilities facing theological education. They have posted a series of short videos by noted theological educators asking ["what is theological reflection?"](#)

Resource Generation is a multiracial membership community of young people (18-35) with wealth and/or class privilege committed to the equitable distribution of wealth, land, and power. They publish a free [Dismantling Racism handbook](#), in addition to their many multi-media resources,

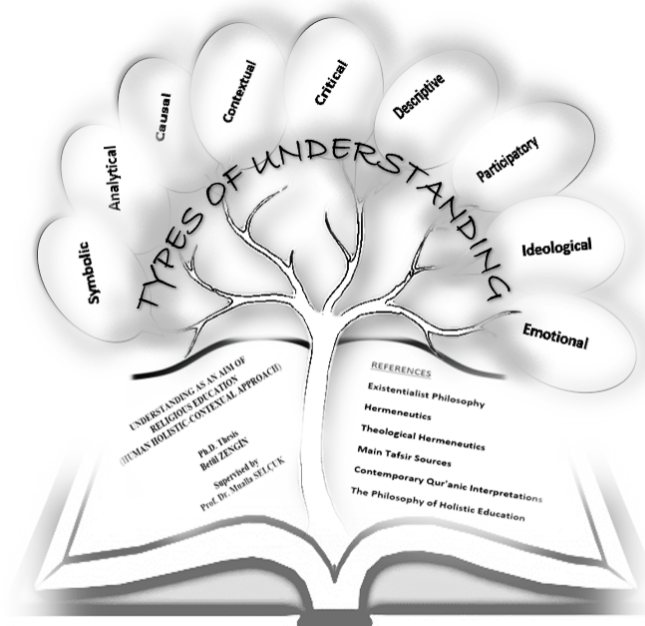
Member news

Harper Award Recipient **Robert Jackson** announces publication of *Religious Education for Plural Societies: Selected Works of Robert Jackson* (Routledge, 2018).

Craig Mitchell successfully defended his doctoral thesis. Entitled “(Re)forming Christian Education in Congregations as the Praxis of Growing Disciples for a Missional Church,” the book can now be accessed for free through the [Flinders University online repository](#).

Theresa O'Keefe announces the publication of her book *Navigating toward Adulthood: A Theology of Ministry with Adolescents* (Paulist Press, 2018).

Matthias Scharer announces the publication of a book he co-edited with Sylke Meyerhuber, Helmut Reiser: *Theme-Centered Interaction in Higher Education* (Springer, 2019).



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

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