

Mary Hess / Networking Coordinator

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Decisions / Action steps

- Work intentionally on recruitment (person to person)
- Consider how to enhance the academic elements of our website

Overall report

For this October 2019 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 1187 email contacts in our database (a net increase of 57 from February), of which 344 are currently paid up members (a net decrease of 15 from February). I do not know how to interpret this decrease? I do think it is worth the Board putting some specific energy into thinking about how we recruit and retain members.

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 (call for papers, various reminders, eREACH available, 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 past-president, Mualla, for consistently sending me news and photos! In the most recent e-REACH (October) I asked both Kathy and Hanan to reflect specifically on the upcoming meeting.

Because eREACH is our most widely read publication, it is also where we are putting information about governance proposals, and so on. All of that information points back to the website, but I fear that some members rarely visit our website.

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. Our technology team (Tenseg) has worked hard to develop links between our membership database and our website, so you can easily update your photos and other information through our membership process. Any updates you make

there will automatically populate through our website. This should help me keep the website more appropriately updated.

We currently follow more than 60 related scholarly and practice organizations (see our glossary page: <http://www.religiouseducation.net/glossary>). We also have a substantial set of videos available at our website (<https://religiouseducation.net/resources/videos>), recordings from past plenary sessions, as well as all of the Proceedings dating back to 2001 (<https://religiouseducation.net/proceedings>). These are really useful resources and I wish more of our membership drew on them. I have heard several anecdotes from members who were contacted by other scholars who found their work on our website via google searches.

I will repeat something I wrote here for the last Board retreat, and that is that I would very much like to showcase more scholarly substance on our site. I would 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 "Catholic Community of Practice" group which recently developed a page and a dialogue section (<https://religiouseducation.net/practice/catholic>)

Facebook: The largest "spike" in Facebook activity we've had since my last report was on September 27th, when we shared the obituary for Dr. John Lawrence Elias. We had 222 views of that post. We are not currently paying for any promotion at Facebook.

Twitter: We currently have 244 followers, which is a net increase of 5 since my last report, and we are following 95 people/organizations, which is the same as 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/YouTube: Due to price increases at Vimeo, we made the decision to move our video archive to YouTube, and to place all future video recordings there. We have not used YouTube in the past, given how much advertising gets placed on videos that are held there. But to be frank, \$free is a whole lot more helpful for us, than is \$240 a year. I will pay close attention to how this channel unfold as we go forward this year. My hope is that we might reach more people, but I have no idea yet of how outside advertising will contextualize our views.

- 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 February has centered around continuing to tweak the new membership management tool they wrote for us. I'm excited by how well our new system is working, and how much easier it is to navigate and use our member data. In particular, Tenseg has helped me to make integration of member information into our website much more consistent – and given members the ability to keep their own information updated.

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 continue to work on this process.

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.religiouseducation.net/scripts/membership/overview.php>

(use the password apprrre) and the annual meeting:

(<http://www.religiouseducation.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://religiouseducation.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 2020 meeting, and working with Boyung to think about how to network in the St. Louis area. We have previously held an REA meeting in St. Louis and I hope to re-activate some of those networking contacts.

- 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. There are new pages at our site that concern governance changes (<https://religiouseducation.net/governancechanges>) and the move to a summer meeting (<https://religiouseducation.net/summermeeting>).

- 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

As noted earlier in this report, I now plan to place any recordings from this November’s meeting at our new YouTube channel, and will be attending to that site carefully to see how it unfolds.

- 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.

- 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.

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 ten 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, the March 2018 Board retreat, the November 2018 meeting in DC, and via

zoom (given a winter snowstorm) February Board retreat for 2019. I have also been present for most 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 part of that process.

- 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 many previous reports, 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)

I have begun the process of working with Boyung, and there is a live conference site for the 2020 annual meeting to which to direct people for the Call for Proposals:

(<https://religiouseducation.net/rea2020/>).

- 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. My hope is that the newly constituted Advancement committee will 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

We worked hard in advance of the last meeting to create a more immediate process for feedback during our meetings. I think that that process was helpful. This year we are also including evaluation "huddles" during the Saturday evening business meeting.