



Reflecting on global challenges
Highlights of the upcoming November meeting
Proposed governance changes
and much more inside!

From our president Kathy Winings

As many of us begin a new term, a new season of CCD sessions, Torah studies or Qur'anic classes, we do so after a summer filled with violence, natural disasters, political changes and continuing divisions. In the United States, we began the new academic year after having witnessed several mass shootings over the summer that resulted in 40 deaths and the injury of 52 more. I am referring to the hate crime shooting in El Paso, Texas in early August, the shooting in Dayton, Ohio the next day and the shooting spree in the Odessa-Midland area of Texas at the end of August. Outside the United States we have also read about the continued fighting by the Taliban forces in Afghanistan, the Civil War in Syria and Boko Haram in Nigeria, to name just a few.

Some of us may also be returning to our institutions after experiencing or helping the victims of any one of the many natural disasters that hit our regions or communities. For most of the summer, those living in multiple states across the United States experienced unending flooding and tornadoes, and they are still dealing with the aftermath of the storms. Those living outside the U.S. also experienced natural disasters on a large scale, including the heavy flooding in Pakistan early in the summer and the severe flooding from the monsoons in



the south and west of India that has impacted millions of people – areas that were already experiencing other challenges that have kept these communities in what has seemed like a constant state of turmoil. Then, just as we began teaching our first class sessions, a major disaster hit the Caribbean in the form of Hurricane Dorian. Classified as a Category 5 hurricane, what made Dorian even worse was the fact that it stalled over the Bahamas with its 185 mph plus winds for almost 48 hours. Whole communities and villages were razed. Each of these disasters resulted in loss of life, loss of home and loss of income, and the damage is still being assessed.

As if these events were not enough, many of us have started our religious education programs in the midst of national elections, heated political debates and political campaigning. Two national level elections have already resulted in a leadership change with a new Prime Ministry in Great Britain and the probable appointment of a new Prime Minister in Israel. Of course, the presidential campaign is just beginning in the United States. We are in the midst of differences that continue to keep us in a state of unrest, tension and fear. Whether these are cultural, ethnic, racial, religious, economic or gender-based differences, they present a challenge to us, to our faith communities and to our students. This is what makes this year's Annual Meeting theme both valuable and relevant.

People around the globe live with an inability it seems to recognize the *imago dei* in others. Yet we, as religious educators, researchers and practitioners, remain hopeful as we continue to teach about the emancipatory hope, to use Dori Baker's terminology, that is at the center of each of our theologies and our faith communities. As she defines it, an emancipatory hope “. . . engages with God's Spirit in practices that liberate toward human flourishing” (19).

In reflecting on our upcoming meeting, I am reminded of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' wisdom from his book, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. He notes clearly that “difference does not diminish; it enlarges the sphere of human possibilities. . . [and] we will learn to live with diversity once we understand the God-given, world-enhancing dignity of difference” (209). The Qur'an also reminds us that God placed us in different nations and tribes so that we might come to enhance mutual understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation” (Qur'an 49:13).

As U. Joy Ogwu, the Nigerian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the U.N. astutely noted, “We must demonstrate to our children that diversity can be embraced, not ignored, not feared, and that our differences of race, religion, ethnicity, and indeed culture have made the tapestry of [human]kind even more beautiful and even more meaningful” (27). The challenge, of course, has been how to demonstrate this beauty and meaning. For Sacks, the best way to demonstrate it and to deal with the violence that comes when we fear our differences is “. . . conversation, speaking our fears, listening to the fears of others, and in that sharing of vulnerabilities discovering a genesis of hope” (2). This, of course, is what we will be doing in Toronto – discovering a genesis of hope through conversation and thoughtful engagement.

In addition to the exciting plenary sessions that we will experience, if you have been going through the schedule (Sched), you will have noticed the many creative papers and poster sessions that will open up some amazing discussions and hopefully provide each of us with take aways that will allow us to continue the conversation in our own contexts. In case you have not begun to mark the break out sessions that you want to attend, here are some of the themes we will be discussing. One paper will look at drawing on a postcolonial imagination and a liberating interdependence to encourage intercultural dialogue in an Indonesian context. Another paper looks at death, suffering and jazz in religious education, pointing toward prostate cancer awareness. Another discussion will delve into social neuroscience, empathy and how religious educators can encourage empathy with the support of contemplative prayer. Thomas Merton and effective dialogue across faith communities will be the subject of another session. Another discussion will look at Black feminism in the Sunday School. Silence and contemplation to support dialogue and communion within difference is another focal point, as is Religious Education, coexistence and North Korean refugees in the United States.

Papers will consider a wide range of contexts from Europe, Hong Kong, Canada and Indonesia. Issues around hip hop, LGBTQ persons, marginalized theologies, the climate crisis and the non-human world will be discussed. Catholicism, Pentecostalism, Protestantism, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam will be included in the papers, and authors will also focus on specific age groups including adolescents, college-aged students, and emerging adults. I think that we will find that the papers will take us on a rich and insightful journey that demonstrates the role that our discipline can play when it comes to going beyond the numerous divisions we are experiencing at home and abroad. There are also the rich sessions offered by ALLLM (Association of Leaders in Lifelong Learning for Ministry), our Related Learning Organization, looking at the opiate crisis in Toronto, educating congregations and taking a look at centers for lifelong learning for ministry. There are so many options from which to choose. That is why I suggest you begin now with Sched to note the particular sessions that you do not want to miss.

As the Islamic scholar M. Din Syamsuddin noted during an address at the United Nations, “Differences, be they religious, ethnic, cultural, or even civilizational, will continue to be a fact of life. But these differences should by no means become a reason why we cannot live in harmony and peace” (29).

I look forward to seeing all of you in Toronto so that we can share the practices and experiences that will liberate us and allow us to enlarge our sphere of possibilities and so flourish. Until then, may all of you have a safe journey to Toronto.

- Baker, Dori Grinenko. Ed. 2010. *Greenhouses of Hope: Congregations Growing Young Leaders Who Will Change the World*. Herndon, VA: Alban.
- Sacks, Jonathan. 2004. *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. New York: Continuum.
- Ogwu, U. Joy. 2012. “Spirituality, Education and Peace.” in *Dialogue and Alliance*. Vol. 26, No.1.26-28.
- Syamsuddin, M. Din. 2012. “Peaceful Mediation of Conflict through Interfaith Dialogue.” in *Dialogue and Alliance*. Vol. 26, No.1. 29-31.

From our program chair Hanan Alexander

We are planning an exciting program for the upcoming REA annual meeting at the Holiday Inn International Airport Hotel in Toronto, November 1-3 2019. The theme of the conference will be: “Coexistence in Divided Democratic Societies: Pedagogies of the Sacred, of Difference, and of Hope.”

There are growing tensions in diverse democratic societies around the world today, in part due to a rising populism on both the right and left of the political spectrum. Some of these tensions arise from disputes both within and among religious traditions, from ultra-Orthodox and fundamentalists on one side to secular humanists on the other, with roots in Christian, Muslim, and Jewish heritages, among many others. No doubt education in general, and religious education in particular, has an important role to play in helping to negotiate and mitigate these tensions. As an interreligious and international association of scholars and practitioners of religious education, it is incumbent on our association to create and consider pedagogies of different kinds to address this growing chasm among conflicting and often incommensurate points of view. Hence, the conference theme.



The conference will open with the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, a unique participatory history lesson, developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, and educators that fosters truth, understanding, respect and reconciliation among Indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. This session promises to be especially meaningful given some of the brave but difficult conversations many of us experienced surrounding issues of race in our association and in our societies at last year's REA annual meeting in Washington, DC.

In addition to parallel breakout sessions featuring papers and presentations on the conference theme, I will offer a Presidential address with responses from HyeRan Kim-Cragg (Timothy Eaton Memorial Associate Professor of Preaching, Emmanuel College of Victoria University in the University of Toronto, Canada) and Hosffman Ospino (Associate Professor of Hispanic Ministry and Religious Education at Boston College, USA). We are also planning three outstanding plenary sessions. Each plenary will feature a panel of leading international scholars and practitioners plus an opportunity for interaction among delegates participating in the session.

The first plenary is on the topic: “Hermeneutics of the Other and Theology of Difference.” It will feature Deborah Kerdeman (former President of the Philosophy of Education Society who serves as Professor of Philosophy of Education at the University of Washington, USA), Michele Voss Roberts (Principal and Professor of Theology at Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, Canada), and Elie Holzer (R. Dr. Ochs Chair for Teaching Jewish Religious Studies at Bar Ilan University). This session will include interfaith text study of the story of Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, and Ishmael from the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Koran.

The second plenary will deal with the theme: “Disrupting the Consequences of Difficult Histories through Education.” It will feature Jabari Mahiri (Briton Family Professor of Urban Education at the University of California, Berkeley and author of *Deconstructing Race: Multiculturalism beyond the Color-Bind*), Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng (Professor of Religious Education Emeritus at Emmanuel College, University of Toronto), Tsafrir Goldberg (Sr. Lecturer in Education at the University of Haifa), and Magda Gross (Sr. Research Associate at the Center to Support Excellence in Teaching, Stanford University). The session will be accompanied by examination of pedagogic cases of disrupting difficult histories, taken from teaching African American experience in the US, the Asian and Indigenous experience in Canada, the Israel/Palestine conflict in Israel, and the Holocaust in Poland.

One aspect of our current social divides involves a raging debate over the possibility of “post-truth,” “alternative facts,” and “fake news.” Among other issues, this debate revolves around the proper relation between empirical evidence on the hand and various political, cultural, and religious narratives on the other. One way to consider this debate is by addressing relations between science and religion. Hence, the final plenary of the conference will feature the theme: “Science and Religious Education in Divided Societies.” The panel of speakers for this session includes Michael Reiss (Anglican Priest and Professor of Science Education at University College, London, and President of the International Society for Science and Religion), Yusef Waghid (Distinguished Professor of Philosophy of Education at Stellenbosch University, South Africa and author of *Conceptions of Islamic Education and African Philosophy of Education Reconsidered*), and Sybrina Atwaters (Director of Educational Services in the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion at the Georgia Institute of Technology). This session will feature an exercise for addressing tensions surrounding the teaching of evolution from Muslim, Jewish, Christian perspectives.

In addition to these challenging sessions, the conference will offer both faith-based and interfaith worship experiences and the usual camaraderie and collegiality for which REA meetings have long been famous. We look forward to seeing you there.

New networking opportunities planned

There are three new networking opportunities planned for this meeting. On Friday evening a gathering space with light refreshments has been planned as a “meet and greet” for people who identify as Participants of Color. A similar “meet and greet” session is planned on Saturday evening for people who identify as Transnational/International participants. In addition to the early morning breakfast for students on Saturday, there is now also a gathering for students planned late that afternoon, prior to the business meeting/reception.

PhD students from the Toronto area are hosting a walking tour on Thursday, for people who come into town ahead of the meeting. Some of the [options for that tour are already posted on the meeting website](#), but more will be forthcoming.

Please prepare for your sessions at this meeting

People who are presenting papers, collaborative sessions, and posters have already been hard at work in preparation for our meeting next month. Please remember that RIG (research interest group) sessions presume that you have read the scheduled papers in advance of the session. Once you have registered for the meeting you will be able to access all of the papers through [Sched](#). Look for the link [[paper](#)] in blue following the Research Interest Group label (as in the example here). If you are presenting or moderating, please be sure to go over the guidelines (which are [on our website](#)).

Contingency Sensitivity as the Basis of Religious Education in Plural Societies
Zekirija Sejdini (School of Education/University of Innsbruck)

Research Interest Group. [Paper] The situation and role of religious education in Europe has changed rapidly. Above all, migration and globalization contributed to increase of religious plurality and the diversity of worldviews. This development also poses new challenges for religious education, whose management is of enormous importance for the preservation of a pluralistic society. Above all, it requires innovative concepts of religious education, which deal constructively with pluralism. An example of such an approach is the concept of a contingency-sensitive religious didactics.

Recent and upcoming changes in governance

In their efforts to listen carefully to feedback provided by the membership in the 2016 Association-wide survey, ongoing program evaluations, and discussions with members, the Board of Directors of the REA has been hard at work to propose and make changes that will increase transparency, efficiency, and accountability to our mission and values. These changes open up exciting opportunities for our Association.

All of the changes have been carefully and extensively discussed. Some are actions by the Board that we want the membership to know about and understand the underlying rationale. Others [require changes to REA Bylaws](#) and require a vote by members present at the Annual Meeting.

Vote at the annual meeting!

First and foremost, we are putting in place a Diversity and Inclusion Work Group explicitly charged with moving the Association to embody more clearly our commitments around diversity of all kinds. While the Board made the initial invitations to form the work group, the latter has complete freedom to organize itself, add members, establish objectives and conduct its work. Funding for the work of this group will be included as a line item in the REA budget.

The five original members of this group are: Dr. Mark Hicks, Dr. Katherine Turpin, Sr. Dr. Addie Loraine Walker, SSMD, Dr. Bert Roebben, and Dr. Arch Wong.

They have significant autonomy, and may well add members to this group.

Additional Board-implemented changes that do not affect the bylaws:

Beginning in 2022, the Annual Meeting will be in July.

This will make it possible for us to meet on university campuses, thus reducing the cost of the meeting for REA and attendees while avoiding the congestion of autumn conferences. We will try this new arrangement for three years and evaluate the change. There will be no November 2021 meeting since we will meet the following summer. Instead, we will plan an expanded REA program at the 2021 American Academy of Religion meeting.

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| • 2020 Meeting | November 6-8 | St. Louis, MO |
| • 2021 Meeting | November 19-21 | Meeting with AAR in San Antonio, TX |
| • 2022 Meeting | July 5-8 | University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, MN |
| • 2023 Meeting | July | on a university campus |
| • 2024 Meeting | July | on a university campus |

An Advisory Council has been created.

- This expands representation and participation of the membership and share leadership through a structure for explicitly connecting with our various diverse constituencies.
- It increases the Board's efficiency and accountability while maximizing the benefits of the wisdom and input that comes from people talented in programming, committed to leadership, or compelled by the vision and mission that guide us.
- Members are drawn from places of REA leadership (for instance, the chairs of standing committees and conveners of working groups), others invited from representative partner organizations (FTE, Wabash, ALLM, and so on), and others invited from our membership at large.

- They will meet once yearly at the Annual Meeting on Sunday afternoon to provide input to the Board about the Meeting, Board actions, and future projects. The first meeting will be November 3, 2019.

A new Advancement Committee for membership and finance has been appointed.

- Important functions of an advancement committee—to increase resources of membership and finances—are currently served by no position on the Board. REA will benefit greatly by paying more attention to growing its membership and developing a disciplined plan for raising funds through grants and campaigns.
- An ad hoc Advancement Committee was appointed and approved by members in November 2019: José Irizarry, Presbyterian Board of Pensions and Villanova University, Chair; Barbara Davis, First Presbyterian Church of New York City; Tamara Henry, New York Theological Seminary
- In January 2020, this committee would become a standing committee of the Board, with two elected committee members and a chair who is a regular member of the Board.
- Appointing an ad hoc committee is a Board action, while creation of a new Standing Committee requires a change to REA Bylaws.

Other proposed changes that require a member vote to change REA Bylaws (2005, last revised 2017):

Reduce Board and committee terms to 2 years, with the option of a second term.

- Currently, most terms are 3 years with reelection allowed after a one-year hiatus. Exceptions are Harper/Wornom committee members (4-year term) and the President, who serves 4 years in successive roles (V-P, Program Chair, President, Past President).
- A 4-year term would provide greater continuity and enough time for an individual to plan and implement programs or address organizational issues. A 2-year term with the possibility of reelection provides a compromise when there are changes in ability, interest, or availability such that 4 years is not a workable option.
- Harper/Wornom committee terms, currently four years, will be reevaluated in the future.

Separate the Program Chair position from the position of President

- Currently, the President serves 4 years in successive roles: Vice-President/Program Chair-Elect, then Program Chair/President-Elect, then President, and finally Past President. The proposed change has the President being elected to a 2-year term with the possibility of reelection to a second term. It focuses the Presidential election on the

vision, tasks, and skills incumbent to that position rather than conflating those skills with ones needed for managing the annual meeting. The President would address the membership at each annual meeting.

- A two- or four-year term improves the ability of the President to exhibit creative and wise leadership that can motivate significant change.
- The Vice-President does not automatically advance to President but is elected to an independent 2-year term. The Vice-President has designated responsibilities on the Board, including chairing the Advisory Council. The Vice-President could be elected President but it would no longer be an automatic trajectory.
- The Program Chair is elected by the membership on the basis of a proposal for the theme of a future meeting. Interested members are invited to submit program proposals which are then voted on by members. The winner is announced at the Annual Meeting and would then be responsible for the REA program two years later.
- Voting on program proposals creates the opportunity for members to select the REA program based on a theme rather than selecting a future president who then creates a thematic program based on their personal interest.
- The Program Chair's term is 2 years, where the first year is spent as Assistant Program Chair to the current Program Chair and the second year is spent implementing their own program for the Annual Meeting.
- Eliminate the position of Past President to reduce costs, shorten the term of service, and increase the clarity of Board roles.

Proposed changes to REA Bylaws are posted on our website where members can review them before the vote is taken at the annual business meeting in Toronto. We have also been holding live Zoom meetings in which Board members make themselves available for discussion. Our next such Zoom meeting will take place on October 21st at 3 pm Eastern time, via this Zoom link: <https://zoom.us/j/9230801444>

REA's electronic communication resources

If you haven't visited the REA website recently, you may be missing out! The REA website is full of useful resources for religious education. In addition to Association news, bylaws, board member contact information, and so on, the website has a lengthy list of journals, electronic portals, and other resources in religious education. You can find a long list of organizations around the world who have some connection to religious education, as well as an ever changing list of degree programs.

The Proceedings of past REA meetings (dating back to 2001) are freely available on our website, as are E-REACH newsletters (dating back to 2011). You can find posts listing openings in the academy and religious organizations, and news of conferences and calls

for papers in related fields. You will also find there a direct link to the electronic archives of our journal, although that requires membership in REA to access.

You can easily access our Twitter, Facebook, and Vimeo sites from our main website. Video recordings of many plenaries -- all the way back to 2009 -- are freely available at Vimeo. Look for the icons to these other sites in the footer of every page of our website as well as on a page devoted to [our social media](#). Incidentally, you can subscribe via RSS to our website, and thus have access to new postings as soon as they are published.

Finally, do not forget that our annual meetings are now run using Sched, an electronic platform which makes it possible not only to sign up for specific sessions, but also to build a profile of yourself and connect with other members during the meeting and beyond.

Enjoying Toronto

Toronto in November can be a city of contrasts. It makes sense to bring layers of clothing -- it could be sunny and warm during the day -- or cold and gray. It's been known to snow in November, but it's also been known to be warm enough to enjoy bicycling.

The [Holiday Inn hotel](#) where our conference is taking place is very close to the International Airport, and the hotel provides a free airport shuttle. The new Union Pearson Express connects the airport to Union Station in the heart of downtown in just 35 minutes, and then you have access to anywhere in the area. Trains leave every 15 minutes and the fee is nominal. Clear maps and other instructions can be found at the [Union Pearson Express site](#).

If you can arrive a day early, Toronto School of Theology graduate students have organized a walking tour on Thursday, following Hanan Alexander's lecture at Emmanuel College (on the University of Toronto campus, in downtown Toronto). You can meet them at Emmanuel College at 2 pm following the lecture and they will guide you to some of the lovelier spots in the area. There are also many, many great places to eat -- for all budgets -- and you may want to stay in the city for your evening meal.

Calling for Intro Syllabi

What are our basic courses called? Religious Education; Ministry; Introduction to Muslim, Jewish or Christian Education; Faith Formation; Teaching the Bible; Education for Transformation? We need your help. Please send a copy of your basic course syllabi to Jack Seymour by October 15, 2019. Whatever you call your "basic" course, send a copy of your syllabus to jack.seymour@garrett.edu. Also send a copy of your school's basic courses that include "education." You will be assisting the work of our field and of REA immensely. Jack will seek to correlate them and give us some insight into how we organize the field through teaching our academic subject.

REA at AAR

Plan now to join your REA colleagues at a special session at the upcoming [American Academy of Religion meeting in San Diego](#). REA's session is P24-403 in the AAR program book, and it will be held on Sunday, November 24th from 6:30 PM-8:00 PM in the Marriott Marquis-Vista (South Tower - First Level)

Our theme for this session is “Scholar, Teacher, Administrator: The Case of the Religious Educator as Dean.”

“Is administrative leadership in your future? We often do not have specialized preparation for such administrative duties, but we bring the excellence of our scholarly training and experience to bear on whatever tasks we undertake and decisions we make. What are the challenges of blending the identities of teacher, scholar, and dean? Four deans with advanced degrees in education as well as religion bring distinct and intriguing insights to a lively discussion probing leadership among colleagues and within institutions.”

Our panelists will all be deans: Dr. Faustino Cruz, Fordham University; Dr. Leah Gunning Francis, Christian Theological Seminary; Dr. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont Graduate University; and Dr. Javier Viera, Drew University Theological School.

Member News

Sybrina Atwaters has been named Director of OMED: Educational Services at Georgia Tech. As part of the Institute for Diversity’s Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion (CSDI), OMED is charged with the retention and development of historically underrepresented minority students at Georgia Tech.

Jennifer Ayres is pleased to announce the publication of *Inhabittance: Ecological Religious Education* (Baylor University Press).

Jeremy Myers and Kristina Fruge are pleased to note the publication of the report on their Lilly-funded project "Mortal, Do You See? Innovative Ministry as Place-based Vocational Discernment," available online.

Jeffrey Schein is pleased to announce the publication of *Text Me: Ancient Jewish Wisdom Meets Contemporary Technology*, a book which furthers his work from the Wornom Grant. (There is a flyer with a discount price included at the end of this e-REACH).

Resources

Boston College Center for Jewish-Christian Learning: The [Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College](#) is dedicated to the growth of new and mutually enriching relationships between Christians and Jews. The Center applies the scholarly resources of a Catholic university to the task of encouraging mutual knowledge between Christians and Jews at every level.

Indigenous Canada: [Indigenous Canada](#) is a free 12-lesson Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) from the University of Alberta that explores Indigenous histories and contemporary issues in Canada. Topics for the 12 lessons include the fur trade and other exchange relationships, land claims and environmental impacts, legal systems and rights, political conflicts and alliances, Indigenous political activism, and contemporary Indigenous life, art and its expressions.

Race and Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Workbook: The Situated Critical Race + Media Committee (SCR+M), formerly known as the Critical Race and Ethnic Studies Committee (CRES) of FemTechNet, has published a [Race and Ethnic Studies Pedagogy Workbook](#) focused specifically on issues that arise in information technologies. Although this is not specifically religious education, the resource is a powerful one with many connections to our work.

State of Formation: Current discourse on religion and ethics is primarily defined by established leaders – ministers, rabbis, academics and journalists. There is an entire population of important stakeholders without a platform: the up-and-comers. The [State of Formation online journal](#) is for up-and-coming religious and ethical thinkers to draw upon the learning that is occurring in their academic and community work.

Video Talking Heads: This project, sponsored by the [European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education](#), is aiming [to collect a range of views](#) from practitioners (teachers, teacher educators, researchers and others) involved in Religious Education from across Europe. Each video is less than two minutes long, and many of our European REA members are represented.



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

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