

Montréal, Palais des Congrès Monday, November 9, 2009

1. Call to Order

President Mark Juergensmeyer called the meeting to order at 11:47 AM. Twenty eight people were in attendance.

2. Approval of 2008 Minutes

The previous year's minutes were approved (Denny/Bowman; unanimous).

3. Memorial List

Mark Juergensmeyer read the predistributed memorial list of members who had passed away since November 1, 2008. Those remembered are: Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, Delwin W. Brown, Luther Russell Bush, Nancy L. Eiesland, Jane Davis Haight, Robert T. Handy, Peter Homans, Donald Jones, Rosemary Skinner Keller, Franklin H. Littell, Michael M. Mendiola, Lucinda J. Peach, William C. Placher, Vanina G. Sechi, Michael A. Signer, and Edith Wyschogrod.

4. President's Report

Mark Juergensmeyer thanked Jack Fitzmier and the AAR staff, as well as the Executive Committee and the Board, for having made his tenure as President productive and pleasant.

He noted two significant developments: 1) The Governance Task Force recommendations were recently submitted and approved by the Board. The Board will consider the necessary bylaw changes at its April meeting, then make the report available on the AAR website in anticipation of a membership-wide vote, likely carried out via electronic ballot; and 2) He has just created a Technology Task Force to come up with specific recommendations in this coming year for what promises to be significant changes to the AAR's use of technology to facilitate academic exchanges between its members.

Videotapes of this year's plenary sessions will soon be available on the AAR website.

5. Report of the State of the Academy

Executive Director Jack Fitzmier underlined the AAR's good health by reflecting on the past year and the year to come.

The past year presented several challenges — e.g., a significant decrease in revenues from investments following the worldwide collapse of the markets, accompanied by a decrease in membership, both of which resulted in major cuts in expenses in order to present a balanced budget. These cuts included the loss of some AAR personnel.

But the budget was balanced in the end, investments are looking brighter, last year's meeting in Chicago was the largest to date (just shy of 6,000 people), and this year's meeting numbers (ca. 4,700) are respectable. AAR finances remains healthy.

Moreover, the AAR has begun a year-long centennial celebration, which has included the announcement of three International Dissertation Research Fellowships — including one endowed by a generous gift to the AAR by family and friends of Dr. Selva Raj.

The year to come will likely soon see an agreement with the SBL that will enable annual concurrent meetings with that organization starting in 2011.

The AAR is also working with the University of Cambridge Centre for Applied Research in Educational Technologies (CARET) to develop an intellectual networking program (currently called Biosphere) for AAR members. Work on this project is proceeding well. Two members of CARET are attending the Montréal meeting seeking feedback from members.

As reported earlier, the Governance Task Force, which met for two years, has just had its report accepted by the Board. The report proposes major changes to the AAR's governance structure. The Board is expected to vote on bylaw changes in the Spring, before bringing the recommended changes to the general membership for a vote. A question from the floor led Jack to summarize the main items from the Task Force report.

Another question from the floor concerned the non-American members of the “American” Academy of Religion, which now make up roughly 15 percent of the membership: might the AAR consider absorbing or redirecting the international mailing fees, and might we see more representation of international members on committees? Jack noted that staff would examine the mailing fees, and that the Nominations Committee continues to work hard to take international representation into account. Mark Juergensmeyer added that the anticipated increase in AAR-sponsored electronic exchanges between members will also benefit international members.

6. 2009 Election Results

Mark Juergensmeyer was pleased to announce the election results: Ann Taves is the new President, Kwok Pui Lan is the new President Elect, Otto Maduro is the new Vice President, and Elizabeth Lawson is the new Student Director, with these positions all taking effect at the end of this meeting.

7. New Business

There was no new business.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 12:25 PM (Townes/O’Keefe).

*Respectfully submitted by Michel Desjardins
November 11, 2009*