



May 17, 2010

Fellow Members of the American Academy of Religion:

For the last several years the AAR has been studying its governance structures with a view toward making needed changes. In the fall of 2007 our Board of Directors formed a Governance Task Force and charged it to study the adequacy of the current bylaws and governance practices and bring recommendations for changes. The objective of the Task Force was to achieve the ideal balance among the following values: representation of the membership as a whole, representation and protection of women and minorities within the profession, representation of the regions, the expertise required to fulfill Board responsibilities, Board effectiveness, and the need to give AAR members ample opportunity to influence and contest important Board and Staff decisions.

The Task Force members included Co-chairs Jeffrey Stout (Princeton University) and Emilie Townes (Yale University), Rebecca Alpert (Temple University), David Kim (Connecticut College), Robin Lovin (Southern Methodist University), Jackie Pastis (LaSalle University), Nelly Van Doorn-Harder (Valparaiso / Wake Forest University), and was staffed by Jack Fitzmier (AAR Executive Director) and Deborah Minor (AAR Director of Finance and Administration).

Early in its deliberations the Task Force concluded that our Academy's bylaws are outdated; our systems for dealing with marginalized constituencies have proven less effective than one would have hoped; our Board is unwieldy and expensive to gather; our election and appointment processes are ill-suited to an organization of our complexity; our Directors do not rotate on and off the Board in a predictable manner; and the Academy's committee structure is in need of a comprehensive review.

The Task Force hoped to address these problems and to envision a more robustly democratic governance environment for the AAR. It hoped to recommend a representative Board and committee structure that is deliberative in character and whose time is spent in discussions of the guild, the needs and concerns of our members, strategic planning, policy development, program assessment, advocacy, and fiduciary matters. Maximizing these governance practices would, the Task Force concluded, meet our Academy's needs and position it for growth and development.

The Task Force made use of an outside consultant and kept in close contact with the AAR Executive Committee and Board as its work progressed. In the fall of 2009, the Task Force delivered its final Report to the AAR Board. The Task Force recommended

That the size of the AAR Board of Directors be reduced from 27 members to 12 members, with this roster: President, President-Elect, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Student Director, Regions Director, Program Unit Director, three At-Large Directors, and a specially appointed Member Advocate Director.

That the number of Directors who are elected from the entire AAR membership be increased. Currently, 6 of our 27 Directors are elected by the entire membership. Under the proposal, 11 of the proposed 12 Directors would be elected by the entire membership.

That the Executive Office and Board continue to schedule an annual Leadership Summit that brings together a broad cross-section of the AAR's volunteer leaders, including members of committees, task forces, juries, and the Board.

That the Board adopt a more energetic and proactive strategy for bringing the concerns of marginalized constituencies and other members of the Academy to the Board, and that the Board itself become more intentionally accountable to the AAR membership. The Report recommends several strategies to accomplish this important goal.

That the Board provide specific representation for students, regions, and program unit directors. Current arrangements allow for student and regional representation, but the Task Force felt strongly that program unit chairs also require particular representation.

That the Board draft and the membership ratify a new set of bylaws. The proposed bylaws would entirely replace the current bylaws. The proposed bylaws change a number of governance policies, add several new committees, and restructure several current standing committees.

On November 6, 2009, the AAR Board of Directors unanimously adopted the Task Force's Report and its recommendations. The Board directed the Executive Director to work with the AAR's attorney to draft a new set of bylaws that would instantiate the governance structure recommended in the Report and replace our current bylaws. This spring, the Executive Committee reviewed the proposed bylaws and recommended them to the AAR Board. On April 10, 2010, the AAR Board unanimously approved a motion to recommend the proposed bylaws to the general membership for adoption. The Board is developing a transition plan: if the proposed bylaws are ratified by the AAR membership, the new governance system will be put in place on January 1, 2011.

Current AAR bylaws require that any proposed changes to the bylaws be made available in writing to the AAR membership at least thirty days in advance of the Annual Business Meeting, which takes place during the Annual Meeting. With this letter, we are providing you with [this electronic link](#) to the proposed bylaws, the full Governance Task Force Report, and FAQs. We suggest that you review these documents carefully. If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to send them to aarbylaws@aarweb.org, and we will seek to address them.

We urge you to attend the Annual Business Meeting at the AAR Annual Meeting in Atlanta on Sunday, October 31, 2010, from 7:30–8:45 A.M. EDT. Your Board of Directors has unanimously recommended that you adopt important changes to the way that the AAR governs itself. We hope you add your voice to the Board's and vote to ratify these bylaws changes.

Sincerely yours

Ann Taves, President

Mark Juergensmeyer, Past President (2009)

Emilie Townes, Co-chair of Governance Task Force and Past President (2008)

Jeffrey Stout, Co-chair, Governance Task Force and Past President (2007)

Members of the 2009 and 2010 AAR Board of Directors

Officers

Ann Taves, *University of California at Santa Barbara*, President (2010)
Mark Juergensmeyer, *University of California at Santa Barbara*, President (2009)
Kwok Pui Lan, *Episcopal Divinity School*, President Elect (2010)
Otto Maduro, *Drew University*, Vice President (2010)
Emilie Townes, *Yale University*, Past President (2009)
David Thibodeau, retired, *Sun Trust Bank*, Treasurer
Michel Desjardins, *Wilfred Laurier University*, Secretary

Student Directors

Nichole Philips, *Vanderbilt University*, Student Director (2009)
Beth Lawson, *Temple University*, Student Director (2010)

Regionally Elected Directors

Scott Kline, *University of Waterloo*, Eastern International Region
Rebecca Sachs-Norris, *Merrimack College*, New England Maritimes Region
Christopher Denny, *St. John's University*, Mid-Atlantic Region
Brian Pennington, *Maryville College*, Southeast Region
Sarah McFarland-Taylor, *Northwestern University*, Midwest Region (2009)
Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *Augustana College*, Midwest Region (2010)
Susan Hill, *University of Northern Iowa*, Upper Midwest Region
Donna Bowman, *Central Arkansas University*, Southwest Region
Susan Maloney, *University of Redlands*, Western Region
Doug McGaughey, *Willamette University*, Pacific Northwest Region
John O'Keefe, *Creighton University*, Rocky Mountain Great Plains Region

Standing Committee Chairs

Fred Glennon, *Le Moyne College*, Chair, Academic Relations
Benny Liew, *Pacific School of Religion*, Chair, International Connections
Rebecca Alpert, *Temple University*, Chair, Nominations Committee
Sarah Pike, *California State University at Chico*, Chair, Public Understanding of Religion
Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, *Shaw University*, Chair, Publications
Miguel De La Torre, *Illiff School of Theology*, Chair, Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession
Judith Plaskow, *Manhattan College*, Chair, Status of Women in the Profession
Tina Pippin, *Agnes Scott College*, Teaching and Learning

JAAR Editor and ACLS Representatives

Charles Mathewes, *University of Virginia*, Editor, *JAAR*
Clark Gilpin, *University of Chicago*, ACLS Representative (2009)
Mary McGee, *Alfred University*, ACLS Representative (2010)