

**AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION
ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING**

**Hilton Hotel Baltimore,
Maryland Saturday, November
23, 2013
6:30PM – 7:30PM**

1. Call to Order -- John Esposito (6:40PM)

President Esposito noted that just one year ago then AAR President Otto Maduro called the business meeting to order. His passing later that spring was a great loss to the Academy and to the field of religion. A moment of silence was observed in his memory.

2. Approval of Minutes of 2012 Business Meeting

The previous year's minutes were approved unanimously

3. Memorial Minutes

President Esposito read the pre-distributed memorial list of members who had passed away since November 1, 2012. The names included were:

C. Alan Anderson, Robert N. Bellah, W. Richard Comstock, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Otto A. Maduro, Nancy McCagney, Joseph T. O'Connell, Eugene Taylor, Ronald F. Thiemann, Larry Menyweather-Woods

A moment of silence was held in the memory of these and any other members who might have passed away in the previous year.

4. Report on the State of the Academy – Jack Fitzmier, Executive Director

AAR Executive Director Jack Fitzmier began his report by noting that it had been a good year for the Academy. He reminded everyone that the Annual Meeting, and all of the other services that the AAR provides for its members, is a product of the year-round good-work of the AAR's wonderful professional staff.

A round of applause was offered by those in attendance as a sign of our gratitude to the AAR staff.

Executive Director Fitzmier also conveyed his thanks to AAR Board members whose terms were ending: Elonda Clay, Melanie Harris, David Kyuman Kim, and Nelly Van Doorn-Harder.

He then reported on the following topics:

Software Development

Under the leadership of the AAR's Chief Information Officer, the AAR has updated all of its software and database programs taking it from an antiquated, unstable situation to a fully functioning suite including: Oasis (the AAR's website); Membership Database (containing records of over 40,000 members; Papers (for handling paper proposals); and Employment Services (owned jointly with our SBL partners). These projects have all launched successfully. They were constructed in an open-software environment with the thought that we might attract other users who will form a user group that will enable us to make continual improvements.

Social Investment Policy

The AAR Board completed its work on developing a social investment policy that enables us to screen out investments in companies whose products are not aligned with members' values (e.g. tobacco, pornography, guns, and coal), while favoring companies whose products reflect members' values (e.g. renewable energy).

Labor Policy Task Force

The joint AAR/SBL Labor Policy Task force presented a series of proposals to the AAR Board and SBL Council that should guide us in the event that any of our contracted hotels enter into a labor dispute with their employees. The policies indicate that all things being equal we favor hotels that use union labor, we make certain hotel management understands our interest in and commitment to fair labor practices, and we've updated our force majeure language to protect us a great deal more in the event of a strike or boycott. These changes are already in use as we are constantly negotiating for additional space in meetings already planned.

AAR Finances

Financially, the AAR is in good shape. We are operating quite closely to the annual operating budget and our balance sheet is exceptional.

Membership

The AAR's membership numbers remain soft as we've yet to recover fully from the downturn associated with the great recession. We are down approximately 15% from our high with current membership at 9400+.

These reductions are not, however, translating into lower attendance at the Annual Meeting. There are over 10,000 AAR and SBL members in attendance in Baltimore.

Baltimore and forward

Baltimore is the last site that was pre-arranged before the agreement to undertake coordinated meetings with SBL. The facilities here were quite good, but the hotel space was “about ½ a belt size too small.” Looking forward we expect to have sufficient space for all future meetings.

5. President’s Report – John Esposito

President Esposito reported being pleased and surprised when elected to the AAR’s presidential line. During term there have been unexpected challenges and opportunities.

President Esposito reported on the following items:

Labor Policy

There was a need for an effective and adequate labor policy that emerged especially as a result of events associated with the Chicago meeting. The development of that policy was difficult, daunting even. Ultimately, we produced a policy that retains our integrity and that has a clearer sense of our rights and possibilities.

New Governance Structure

We are three years into a new organizational structure that was a departure from the way things had been done in the past. There is a need for some significant fine-tuning, but that can only be done as issues emerge and leadership roles gain clarification within the new system. The new board structure has gone from a representational model to one that requires greater levels of awareness among the leadership of the AAR’s varying constituencies. This task will be taken up by the AAR presidential line which now includes: Laurie Zoloth, Thomas Tweed, and Serene Jones.

Addition to the Business Meeting Agenda

Recognizing that business meetings should be as much about the future as they are about the past, a new agenda item has been added so that the incoming President of the AAR can speak to the members about the his/her goals/wish list for the coming year

6. 2013 Election Results

Serene Jones elected as Vice President
Gregg Johnson elected as Program Unit Director
Mayra Rivera elected as At-Large Director
Kristy Slominski elected as Student Director

7. President Elect's report – Laurie Zoloth

President-elect Zoloth began by thanking the AAR staff and other board members for an extraordinary two years.

President-Elect Zoloth reported on the following items

Pride in Labor Policy and Socially Responsible Investment Policy

We should be tremendously proud we should be about the Labor Policy that was announced earlier. It was a year ago that over 80 members were crowded into an early morning business meeting, and the policy that emerged is an expression of a democratic process that enabled us to enact our best hopes.

We should also be proud of the socially responsible investment policy that has been established and that the AAR is putting into place as we speak. As part of this transition, it's important to note that we moved quickly to eliminate from our portfolio any investments that would enable us to profit from the manufacture and sale of guns.

Both of these actions indicate that we can act as a community of scholars.

Presidential Goals for the Coming Year

Promoting and Protecting Our Guild

We are under tremendous threat regarding the nature, goal and meaning of academic life. For our graduate students sake we need to be strong advocates on behalf of this guild. Without assuming any one person has the answers, there is good reason to believe that among the 10,000 AAR members there are answers to be found. We must make certain we have a strong and vibrant guild.

Global Warming – The Annual Meeting's Theme for 2014

As publically committed scholars, it is crucial that we think carefully about the ways we are responding to the largest crisis that faces our planet – global warming. At times we are told that individuals cannot have much of an impact on a crisis like global warming. The AAR, however, has almost 10,000 members and what we do and say will

matter, it will have an impact. For that reason we have a duty to ask the question: What should the AAR look like, day by day, at our Annual Meeting, in our work and research? What are our duties and obligations to a crisis that is imperative? We do not have the time to make a perfect world we have to make a world that is hospitable and welcoming. AAR members are the ones who can help make it so. Executive Director Jack Fitzmier leads a talented staff. We can all see how good they are in their work, but they can only do so much. AAR members can be the other half of our response to this crisis.

President Zoloth closed by indicating she was interested to hear the thoughts and ideas of AAR members regarding these two topics as well as others.

8. New Business

Status of Underrepresented Persons Working Group Motions

Melissa Wilcox, chair of Working Group on the Status of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex & Queer Persons in the Profession, representing three of the AAR's 4 working groups on underrepresented persons, asked about the status of several recommendations that had been presented to the Board of Directors by members of the Working Groups on: the Status of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex & Queer Persons in the Profession, the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the Profession, and the Status of Women in the Profession.

The items under discussion had to do with recommendations involving changes to the procedures governing the appointment of new working group members and chairs.

AAR Secretary Warren Frisina reported these items were taken up by the Board over the past year, and were referred to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee made recommendations for action to the Board. Those recommendations were taken up at the Board's most recent meeting (11/22/2013). The decision at that time was to table the motions one more time pending further discussion among the AAR leadership and the working group chairs and members. The dates and location of a January Board Meeting were shifted so that there would be overlap with the Working Groups. This was done to enable a fuller understanding by Board Members of the issues that Working Group Members were concerned about, as well as sufficient time for arriving at a collaborative resolution to those concerns.

Subsequent discussion brought to light the following:

That there are older recommendations (from 2012) from these Working Groups still pending having to do with a) generating a “best practices” survey regarding supporting faculty through the tenure process; b) that individual working groups be given permission to engage in public advocacy around issues that concern their constituencies without requiring approval of the Executive Committee; and c) that the AAR develop guidelines for engagement in public advocacy, both within and beyond the Academy.

Board minutes show that these recommendations were tabled on 4/20/2012 pending further discussion and have not yet been taken up again by the Board.

Regarding the issue of appointing members and chairs to the Working Groups, it was suggested that particular attention be paid to what the by-laws mean when they indicate that the President must *consult* with Working Group chairs and members.

This will be a topic for further discussion among the AAR Board and Working Group leadership in Newark at the January meetings.

9. Adjournment 7:20