

AAR Regional Development Grant Application August 1, 2012

**Midwest Conference on Religion, Health & the Body in North America
May 2013**

Submitted by:

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Introduction

In a joint effort between Kalamazoo College, Michigan State University, and Western Michigan University, we are organizing a conference scheduled for May 2013, to bring together Religious Studies scholars primarily from the Midwest to advance scholarship on religion, health and the body in the North America. The conference, hosted by Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, will run for two and half days. We are applying for an AAR Regional Development Grant, to help cover some of the costs of this endeavor.

The three conference organizers are currently working on projects centered on religion, health, and the body and are thus eager to engage with other scholars in the region and beyond who are working in this new and vibrant subfield in Religious Studies. Recent publications show a growing interest this particular form of “lived religion” in the United States in its many forms. For example, Claire Hoertz Badaracco’s *Prescribing Faith: Medicine, Media, and Religion in American Culture* (2007), explores how media shapes the way we imagine the relationship between religion, medicine and American bodies; Heather Curtis’ *Suffering and Divine Healing in American Culture, 1860-1900* (2007), examines how nineteenth-century American evangelicals redefined bodily suffering in an age of medical advancements; and Pamela E. Klassen’s *Spirits of Protestantism: Medicine, Healing & Liberal Christianity* (2011), analyzes liberal Protestantism’s evolving approach to bodily health. All three of these scholars will be invited to this conference, along with others from the region who are engaged in similar research. We will also invite scholars from outside the region, as well as graduate students who are researching this topic.

Description & Event Details

The conference schedule will run from Friday afternoon (May 17, 2013) to Sunday morning (May 19, 2013). We anticipate 40 participants including the presenters and a plenary speaker. The conference will include three panel sessions, one site visit, and a plenary address. To foster conversation among the scholars, papers will be circulated prior to the conference and panelists will be restricted to fifteen-

minute reviews of their essays. This format will enable us to reach one of the goals of the conference: to increase interaction among faculty and students in the region. We have included plenty of hospitality gathering time to encourage informal dialogue and to cultivate strong ties among regional scholars. Below is the tentative schedule for the conference:

Friday, May 17, 2013

9 AM-3 PM: Participants arrive and settle into lodgings

3-5 PM: Site Visit

5 PM: Reception

6 PM: Dinner and Welcome

Saturday, May 18, 2013

7-8:45 AM: Breakfast

9-10:30 AM: Session I

11 AM-12:30 PM: Session II

12:45 PM: Lunch

3-4:30 PM: Session III

5 PM: Reception

6 PM: Dinner and Plenary Address

Sunday, May 19, 2013

7-8:45 AM: Breakfast

9 AM: Participants leave

Justification for the Region

We foresee several benefits and outcomes from this conference. First, it will provide a venue for scholars in the Midwest (faculty and graduate students) to interact beyond the classroom setting. It will enable graduate students to network with faculty from various parts of the region (and beyond); and it will allow faculty to engage with the innovative work being done by emerging scholars. The conference location is easily accessible via road, rail and air, and we will provide free housing to graduate students to help alleviate some of the costs. Through this conference we seek to create dialogue among regional scholars at different points in their careers.

Second, the organizers plan to capitalize on the location of the conference by highlighting local historical attractions such as the Kellogg Sanitarium in Battle Creek and early Lake Michigan Vedanta yoga retreats, two religious sites that have served as practical crossroads for practitioners of healing, spirituality and medicine in the Midwest. Part of the conference will involve a site visit (most likely to the Battle Creek Sanitarium) to highlight the ways in which material practices intersect with religious ideas about health and the body. Hopefully this will encourage all participants to think about the ways in which religions intersects with health and body in local ways that may or may not mirror national trends.

Finally, this conference will result in two distinct tangible outcomes to continue the conversation beyond 2013. First, we plan to publish the papers in an edited volume and will seek a contract with a major university press. Second, we anticipate that the

May 2013 conference will be the launching pad for a NEH Summer Institute on religion, health, and the body in North America to be held the following year. At the close of the 2013 conference, the organizers will apply for the NEH Summer Institute grant for the Summer of 2014. Professor Wilson has an appointment to discuss this with a representative of the NEH on August 21, 2012 in Washington, DC.

Budget

Attached is a spreadsheet with a detailed, line-item budget for the conference using facilities at Western Michigan University. We request \$--- from the AAR. The funds will cover the logistical costs of hosting this conference. We would be grateful for any support that you may offer us. We have already secured \$--- support from the Western Michigan University's Comparative Religion Department and \$1--- from WMU's Extended University Programs in association with WMU's new graduate certificate program in religion, health, and spirituality.