
International Academy
of Practical Theology



www.ia-pt.org

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President's Newsletter, September 2009

Greetings to IAPT members:

As your new president and on behalf of the Executive Committee, I want to take this opportunity to update you on recent and future activities of the Academy.

Conference 2009

At the end of July and beginning of August, 62 members and 17 guests gathered in Chicago for our biennial conference on "Religion, Diversity, and Conflict." It was an excellent meeting, thanks to the hospitality of host Ed Foley, the leadership of past President Ruard Ganzevoort, and the work of the local committee and Executive Committee. Our gratitude to everyone who made the meeting a success. I have attached a list of attendees and their emails (also posted on the IAPT website).

The conference reminded me of why I find the discipline of practical theology so promising. In plenary and seminar reflections on such topics as peacemaking, baptism, Sabbath, ministerial formation, action theory, ethnicity, interreligious connections, torture, international law and much more, people engaged religious practice in all its detail. As important as the trafficking between practice and theory was the desire to motivate change in race relations, international affairs, students' lives, congregational politics, and many other locations. These two traits—love of the particular and desire to affect transformation—stood out as major contributions of the discipline.

Additional highlights of the conference included an evening at the University of Chicago Divinity School where David Tracy revisited practical theology, arguing that it plays a key role in healing the modernist split between academic theology and spirituality long united in the learned exercises of ancient and medieval philosophy and theology. Ruard Ganzevoort's presidential address brought the conference to a close with a journey through the "forks in the road" of our discipline. Decisions about the object, method, research position, and audience of practical theology demonstrate a growing consensus within which our diversity flourishes. But it is unfair to single out any one presentation. The banquet of ideas was rich. I doubt I'm alone in having had difficulty choosing between seminars, missing papers that sounded fascinating, and cutting short conversations that await our next conference. Not a bad frustration to have at all!

Conference 2011

I invite you to join me in looking forward to our next conference, "City of Desires, City of God," July 21-25, 2011 in Amsterdam. Ruard Ganzevoort will serve as host in collaboration with a local planning committee. He will send further reflections on the conference theme in due time. The new Executive Committee has already met and begun to work with him on details. We invite your suggestions. We learned a great deal from the Chicago conference and thank Ed Foley in advance for his willingness to complete a manual that will serve as a guide for the organization of future meetings.

Publications

I have the reward of inheriting an academic society that stands in excellent shape and I am grateful to my predecessors. We have growing edges, to be sure, but we have made significant progress on a number of fronts.

Since 2003, we have had a standing commitment with Lit-Verlag to publish an edited volume of conference papers in its recognized series, "International Practical Theology." The Executive Committee will work with the independent board of editors of the series to insure an excellent publication. At this year's business meeting, the membership agreed to a more focused 250-page volume with approximately 20 chapters on the conference theme. We also agreed that, when appropriate, the conference host will serve as the Conference Editor. I am delighted that Ed Foley will act in this capacity. Neil Pembroke, Member at Large on the Executive Committee, is joining him as Series Editor, providing editorial oversight and serving as a liaison with the Executive Committee. Ed Foley has already been in touch with conference participants about the submission of papers. The membership also agreed to a slight dues increase to expand membership benefits to include a copy of the volume through financial arrangements with Lit-Verlag Press.

Finances

We have also made significant financial progress thanks to the efforts of the previous Executive Committee and secretary Pam Couture to establish a consistent means of dues payment through PayPal. Collection of past dues has given the Academy funds to support the planning of our next conference and other needs, such as regional networking and conference scholarships.

Membership

Finally, thanks to past secretary Jim Nieman our record of conference attendance is accurate and our membership rolls match our active participants. I welcome again new members present at the 2009 conference: Dale P. Andrews (USA), Tom Beaudoin (USA), Johan Cilliers (South Africa), Brian Froehle (USA), Paavo Kettunen (Finland), Raymond Kumalo (South Africa), Roy Lazar (India), Isabelle Noth (Switzerland), Ramiro Pellitero (Spain), Robert Schreiter (USA), and Gerard Whelan (Ireland, working in Rome). We look forward to your continued contributions. Seven other new members were nominated but unable to attend. We look forward to greeting you in Amsterdam.

Membership Nominations for 2011

I invite you to begin to consider nominations for 2011. At the business meeting, the membership set nominations at 20% of our current membership or 20 new members. Nominations of those with a distinguished scholarly record and interest in the Academy's purpose should be made no later than July 21, 2010, one year from our next conference. In making nominations, I encourage you to consider underrepresented groups in terms of geographical location and gender.

Conference Scholarship Fund

As members of the Academy, we also need to support the participation of those we nominate. I strongly encourage you to reach out to new members and stay in touch with them to promote their attendance and contribution.

As one means to support the participation of active members who lack sufficient institutional resources to attend biennial conferences, members affirmed the general ideal behind a proposal put forward by Rod Hunter, Kathleen Cahalan, and Ray Webb to establish a scholarship fund and procedures for its distribution. The Executive Committee will work to refine and implement the proposal's suggestions.

Fundraising

Member contributions: Donation to the IAPT scholarship fund made by 15 members when paying dues and registering for the conference allowed 2 members without sufficient resources to attend the conference. I want to thank all those who contributed. I encourage others to consider doing so in the future. Even a small gift of \$25, spread across our membership, would raise significant funds. We will continue the practice of offering this option when paying dues and/or registering. We will also create a heading on the main IAPT webpage for direct "Donations."

Institutional contributions: I thank Jim Poling (james.poling{at}garrett.edu) and Will Storrar (wstorrar{at}ctinquiry.org) for their willingness to head up an effort to raise funds from outside organizations for scholars with limited resources. Please contact one of them if you have ideas or suggestions.

Regional Networking

The Executive Committee also hopes to strengthen the international reach of practical theology through better understanding of other academic networks in practical and contextual theology. Ruard Ganzevoort began this effort by attending several regional academic meetings. As our new Vice-President, Jean-Guy Nadeau will focus some of his energies on continuing to foster connections with the Société Internationale de Théologie Pratique and to initiating connections with academic societies in Latin America. Jaco Dreyer, Member at Large, will initiate a similar effort in Africa, connecting with colleagues, seeking connections with academic societies, and enriching our understanding of what is happening in practical theology. We may devote time during our 2011 conference to research reports on international developments.

Executive Leadership

In the past six years, the Executive Committee has raised the problem of continuity and proper care of procedures as our organization grows. The current Executive Committee will solidify two means to strengthen leadership: (1) further clarification of tasks for each position on the Executive Committee and (2) development of a manual for the Executive Committee. All members except the President and Vice-President can serve two terms. When possible, such succession seems optimal. When possible, it also seems helpful to see the Vice-President as an eligible candidate for Presidency, although such succession is not presumed.

Web

One of my first acts as President was to explore the IAPT website, www.ia-pt.org and I discovered a wealth of information. I invite you to make use of it. This newsletter will be posted along with news of the upcoming conference and it will continue to serve as our means of registration and dues payment. Among other resources, you will find materials from this and other IAPT conferences and links to related organizations. A list of attendees from the 2009 conference and their emails can be found there and a list of IAPT members in general, some with hyperlinks to their personal homepage when it could be located. If your page isn't linked, please use the site to notify Ruard Ganzevoort who has agreed to continue his work as webmaster.

Future Directions

Besides efforts to improve fundraising, strengthen continuity of leadership, and foster regional connections, an important growing edge for the Academy is greater inclusion of missing voices from underrepresented locations around the globe, such as the southern hemisphere and eastern Europe. Attention to a inclusivity in nationality, ethnicity, and gender should shape our efforts across a number of fronts—membership nomination, program planning, and publication. I invite you to join me in this effort.

I also hope to improve scholarly interchange among active members. As the new Executive Committee discovered when we introduced ourselves at our first committee meeting, we did not know as much as we thought about each other's research and the intersecting interests around the table. I look forward to finding ways to allow us to recognize and learn more deeply from each other's work.

Again, I'm grateful for the work of those who have gone before me and honored to serve the Academy over the next two years in its efforts to enrich the discipline of practical theology.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Miller-McLemore, USA (President)

On behalf of the Executive Committee:

Jean-Guy Nadeau, Canada (Vice President)
Heather Walton, UK (Secretary)
Pam Couture, USA (Treasurer)
Jaco Dreyer, South Africa (Member at Large)
Neil Pembroke, Australia (Member at Large)
Ruard Ganzevoort, Netherlands (Program Committee Chair)