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| International Academy of Practical Theology  <http://www.ia-pt.org> | IAPT | *President: Prof. Heather Walton* *Theology and Religious Studies*  *University of Glasgow*  *Glasgow G12 8QQ*  *United Kingdom*  [president@ia-pt.org](mailto:president@ia-pt.org) |

June 2016

**Dear IAPT Colleague,**

This has been a busy time for the Executive Committee. A major concern has been issues relating to membership. We have enjoyed reviewing your nominations of new members and are happy to present an excellent group of new colleagues to the Academy. Alongside this significant but routine work we have been reflecting on the mandate given to us at the Pretoria Conference to urgently consider the basis for membership of our organization. We received a strong steer towards broadening our rigorous membership criteria and restricted numerical base. This is particularly important in order to be more inclusive of younger scholars and to engage with the issues of under-representation that have long concerned our members. Below you will find an account of our discussions thus far. For all our members the IAPT Conference is the most significant aspect of our corporate life. Planning for this has been progressing very well and this newsletter also contains reference to how members may support participation at this event.

***Nomination of New Members***

In accordance with the By-Laws and bearing in mind the guidance of the Pretoria meeting we were happy to approve the following nominations for membership of the Academy. The membership of these persons will take effect at the first conference they attend:

Júlio Cézar Adam (Escola Superior de Teologia, São Leopoldo, Brazil)

Sivert Angel (Practical Theology Seminary, Oslo, Norway)

Ruth Conrad (University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany)

Gordon Dames (UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa)

(Jos) de Kock (Protestant Theological University, Amsterdam, Netherlands)

Sune Fahlgren (Stockholm School of Theology, Stockholm, Sweden)

Tobias Faix (YMCA University of Applied Sciences, Kassel, Germany)

Mary Froehle (St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach, FL, USA)

Bard Erik Hallesby Norheim (NLA University College, Bergen, Norway)

Jung Eun Jang (Ewha Women's University, Seoul, Korea)

Kristine Helboe Johansen (Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark)

Yohan Ka (Handong University, Pohang, Korea)

Tone Kaufman (Norwegian School of Theology, Oslo, Norway)

Elsabe Kloppers (UNISA, Pretoria, South Africa)

Andrea Lehner-Hartmann (University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria)

Birgitte Lerheim (University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway)

Axel Liegeois (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium)

Swee Hong Lim (University of Toronto, Canada)

Miriam Martin (St Paul’s University, Ottawa, Canada)

Kristin Merle (University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany)

Cecilia Nahnfeldt (Head of Research, Church of Sweden, Uppsala, Sweden)

Jantine Nierop (University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany)

Hosffman Ospino (Boston College, Boston, USA)

Tibor Reimer (University of Saint Elisabeth, Bratislava, Slovakia)

Alfred Stephen (Tamilnadu Theological Seminary, Arasaradi, India)

Carl Sterkens (Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands)

Michael Stoeber (University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada)

Anne Vandenhoeck (Catholic University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium).

***Discussions of Membership***

*The Need for Change*

The Executive received a clear mandate from the Pretoria Business Session to consider how the By-Laws might be amended in order to facilitate the development of a more inclusive and participatory organizational base. The reasons for this instruction were manifold but include the following key concerns:

* Despite the considerable efforts made by the Executive over many years we remain a narrowly-based body with a membership that is predominantly male and Western.
* Our membership requirements make it difficult for scholars in less affluent contexts who have restricted time, research opportunities or publication opportunities to qualify. We have long recognised and debated this issue in regards to under represented regions.
* It is difficult for many practical theologians doing significant new work to meet the coded status requirements of ‘significant contribution to scholarship.’
* Young and emerging scholars who wish to join IAPT are ‘put on hold’ until they are deemed appropriately qualified to participate fully in our life and work. This sends discouraging signals to gifted and enthusiastic early career scholars.

As the Executive began to reflect upon these themes we asked ourselves whether, behind these very significant concerns, lies an unarticulated but pressing question: *what does IAPT gain by keeping people who wish to join out of our Academy?* This is not just a question concerning our own institutional life. Our principle reason for existing is to promote the creative development of our discipline.

In the past this question might have been answered in terms of building an organisation that was academically rigorous enough to set new research standards in practical theology and raise the status of the discipline. There were reasons for believing that an elite body with stringent membership requirements was one way of supporting colleagues in their efforts to establish scholarly credibility and their personal academic status. Represented in our current membership are colleagues who consider that such exclusivity (in its current or a moderated form) still makes a positive academic contribution. It sustains a body of scholars at the apex of the discipline who are closely bound together in an international body that, through conferences, publications and specific networking opportunities, generates and promotes excellence.

It is also the case that many of us deeply value the intimacy and profound encounters that are made possible by travelling together with a relatively small group of people over a period of years. Within IAPT this has partly been sustained through maintaining a restricted membership. However, many of us are increasingly concerned that the negative consequences of membership limitation outweigh the benefits. International scholarly societies are increasingly based upon the open participation of persons committed to research in the field. We have seriously considered the challenge that IAPT’s membership structure appears regressive and increasingly anachronistic when viewed alongside the patterns espoused within the societies of other disciplines. It is not only our image and credibility that is at stake but whether we have responded adequately to the challenges of inclusivity that are rightly given high priority in contemporary academic life.

*Ways Forward*

Whilst the Executive Committee understood there was a clear steer from our members to move towards a more open membership, discussions at Pretoria revealed differences in understandings of the best way forward. In our joint reflections we identified four possible options:

1. Continue within the principle of restricted membership but modify the entrance requirements so that they are more somewhat more attainable and increase the membership quota. The advantage of this is that it maintains the established identity of IAPT whilst allowing for moderated change. However, the Executive felt that this was not really steering IAPT into a positive or more inclusive future. Given the changing academic climate, this move could be counterproductive and institute a slow process of decline. Our discussions revealed a corporate sense that we were entering a new era and that we needed to be willing to contemplate more radical change than this option allows.
2. Introduce a form of two-tier membership. This could operate in a variety of ways:

* People from under-represented regions or groups at a recognised scholarly disadvantage could be admitted according to different membership criteria to those from dominant contexts. We asked ourselves whether we already operated this differentiated selection process but in a covert form.
* Introduce a form of associate membership until people have achieved the academic status we deem acceptable to include them in the Academy.
* Maintain a distinction between people who are studying practical theology as research students and those who have doctoral qualifications/research outputs in the field.

In our discussion the Executive came to believe that there would beserious problems with power, status and institutional credibility within at least the first two of these differentiated membership schemes. We could still be judged to be an elitist body intent on keeping people out of membership. The proposal to grant associate to membership for research students would not carry this disadvantage.

1. Have a modified form of open membership but continue to enforce attendance regulations to sustain networking and coherence. In this model full membership might be restricted to those with research degrees or significant publications in practical theology and associate membership given to postgraduate researchers. This would not be second-class status but rather transitional status. We would be open to the gifts and insights of younger scholars and those whose social or geographical context means that they are unable to undertake ongoing research in traditional forms but are nevertheless at the cutting edge of the discipline. The Committee recognised that it might be difficult to maintain conference attendance requirements in the longer term but nevertheless felt that this might be a way forward that enabled us to sustain identity and negotiate change*.* We also recognised that it would not automatically mean IAPT became a more inclusive organization as new applicants were still more likely to come from elite groups.
2. Have an entirely open membership and welcome anyone who wants to join us without qualification or attendance requirements. This may be the ultimate result of beginning a radical process of change – whatever route we take. We would look much more like other international scholarly societies of the 21st century than we do now. However, we would cease to look or feel like IAPT; the Executive Committee felt that precious aspects of our corporate life would be lost.

*The View of the Executive Committee.*

After considerable debate the Executive has unanimously agreed to recommend the third option and to bring forward recommendations for amendments to the By-Laws that reflect this position. We believe it offers a way forward that is progressive, equitable and sustains the ethos of our academic community.

However, reforming the criteria for membership will not in itself generate greater inclusivity. We believe that we have to now seriously address the problem of generating sufficient funds for scholars from underrepresented regions/groups to play a full role in our corporate life. It is our belief that future membership dues should be set at a level that includes a modest but realistic surcharge. The money raised would give renewed life to our Scholars Fund and enable us to offer real support to Practical Theologians who currently lack the resources to make their rich contribution to IAPT’s academic Community.

We will now begin work on concrete proposals for amending our By-Laws and will circulate these to members before presenting them at the Oslo Conference.

***Supporting the 2017 Oslo Conference - Reforming: Space, Body, and Politics***

Planning the next conference has been an extremely enjoyable aspect of our shared work. Colleagues from the Nordic Region have put together a great programme and this is now available on the website. To remind you of the August 15th deadline of the call for papers: membership fees become due with each conference and at this time we also call upon members to remember our shared duty to support the participation of IAPT scholars who would not otherwise be able to attend the conference.

**Membership Fees**: If you have not paid your 2015-20107 (Pretoria Conference) membership fees, please do so as soon as possible. We will soon update the IAPT website to collect 2017-2019 (Oslo Conference) membership fees.

**Donations to the Scholarship Fund**: Your contribution to the IAPT Scholarship Fund enables colleagues needing financial assistance to participate in biennial conferences, by providing them with travel subsidy. Donations are accepted in Euros and US Dollars.

You can pay your membership and make donations by clicking on the link below:

<http://www.ia-pt.org/membership/dues-and-donations/>

I close this (long) letter with greetings from an anxious and divided Britain. Many of us here are very upset about the turn from international co-operation represented by the recent referendum results in our country. I am very glad, in this context, to have the opportunity to engage in positive work to build living networks of international exchange. I know that these will become even more important to us all as we face the huge ‘reforming’ challenges of the coming years.

In hope and peace,



Heather Walton, President.

On behalf of the Executive Committee:

Robert Mager (Vice President)  
Annemie Dillen (Secretary)  
Faustino Cruz (Treasurer)  
Constanze Thierfelder (Member at Large)

Cas Wepener (Member at Large)

Auli Vähäkangas (Programme Committee)

Trygve Wyller (Host Committee)