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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) |

February 2017

Dear IAPT Colleague,

Happy New Year. I am sure we are all going into the coming months with a certain amount of uncertainty and trepidation concerning the difficult political challenges which are facing us all around the world - particularly as they effect international relationships. In this context I find that the very positive and cooperative work we are able to do within the Academy a source of hope and strength to me – as I hope you do too.

As you will be aware the Executive has been particularly occupied over the last year in thinking about the future of IAPT. This has meant considering the changes that will be necessary if we seek to broaden and extend our membership, to become more inclusive of both younger scholars and those from under represented regions. In short we are seeking to present a more welcoming and dynamic face to the world.

You will shortly be receiving a lengthy mailing containing all the various reports that are customarily presented at our conference business sessions. Within this latter document there will be proposals for significant changes to our by-laws. This newsletter will be largely focused upon this issue. In this mailing we want to set out what these proposals will mean and why we are bringing them forward. The whole Executive is unanimous in our support for what is outlined here but we do understand that the issues we have been debating so earnestly over the past months will also need to be fully discussed and owned by our membership. A number of you have already given us your feedback (generally positive) but there will be opportunity for you to comment further in the weeks leading up to Oslo and at our meeting itself. We do ask that if you are proposing amendments to the Executive’s plans you do so in writing and preferably prior to our meeting.

*The Need for Change*

In my newsletter of July 2016 I set out at length how the Executive had considered the issue of membership and this discussion is attached here as a paper entitled ‘The need for change’ should you wish to revisit it. To summarise the key points again:

* The Executive received a very clear mandate from the Pretoria Business Meeting to bring forward proposals to revisit our membership requirements as these were felt to be overly restrictive and resulting in able and gifted scholars (particularly those from under represented regions) being ‘put on hold’ for many years if they did not appear to have yet made a significant contribution to scholarship.
* The Executive considered the question, ‘*What does IAPT gain from keeping people who wish to join out of our Academy?’* We felt that the disciplinary issues that had lead to the formation of an ‘exclusive’ organization were largely a thing of the past and that there was now a strong energy and confidence apparent in our subject area. Furthermore, our membership criteria seem increasingly unusual in the context of most other international learned societies.
* To open up membership we considered four *possible strategies*:

1. Make the requirements somewhat less stringent and increase the quota of new members that could be admitted. The Executive felt that this option did not respond adequately to the corporate sense that we were entering a new era which required a new membership structure
2. Have a form of two-tier membership. We discussed this at length in the Executive but in the end felt that we did not want to foster any sense that there were two classes of scholars in IAPT - within the inevitable hierarchy issues this would entail. We did, however, think that associate membership was appropriate for those who were still in the process of undertaking doctoral research in the discipline
3. Have a modified form of open membership which welcomed all those who had a doctoral degree in any area of practical theology as well as those whose doctorate was in another area but who were currently making a substantial contribution to the discipline. In order to preserve the rather precious and unusual collegiality of IAPT it would be possible to still make conference attendance a requirement of membership. This was the option the Executive favoured whilst recognizing that a changed ethos would inevitably accompany a more open membership and this attendance requirement may have to be revisited in years to come
4. Move to a completely open membership. This was not felt to be either necessary or desirable by the Executive.

The implementation of option three above would entail very substantial changes to our By-Laws. This is nonetheless the option which we deemed the best for our Academy at this time.

*Changes to the By-Laws*

Attached is a paper entitled ‘By-Laws Proposed Amendments 2017’ which sets out what these changes would be. In summary it would entail:

* Revising membership categories. We propose moving towards three tiers of membership. These would be active members, retired members and associate members. Associate membership would be available to those undertaking doctoral research on the understanding that they would progress to full membership on completion of their studies.
* Removing membership quotas.
* Introducing membership by application rather than nomination
* Revising eligibility to criteria to make entry into the Academy a matter of having either a doctorate in an area of practical theology or having a doctorate in another discipline and having made a substantial contribution to practical theology.
* We have also taken the opportunity to revise the regulations concerning the various conference planning committees. This is simply in order to bring them into line with the practice that has been established for a number of years.

As stated the Executive Committee welcomes any comments you might have on these changes, preferably in advance of our meeting. We ourselves have found the prospect of implementing major change challenging but in the course of discussions have become excited about steering the Academy towards a new stage of its life. We believe that the changes will offer exciting potential that will benefit all our members – and those who will become members in the future.

We wish you strength, hope and peace in the year to come.



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)