

## AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION SOUTHWEST REGION

### REPORT TO MEMBERSHIP

The Southwest Region held its annual meeting March 7-9, 2014 at the Marriott DFW in Irving, Texas in conjunction with three other organizations (SBL-SW, ASSR, and ASOR) who jointly with AAR-SW compose the Southwest Commission on Religions Studies (SWCRS), which this year was observing its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The program comprised 26 AAR sessions. The plenary speaker was AAR Past President John Esposito, who spoke about "Religion, Politics, and the Public Square: Desecularization and the Academy" in an informal and engaging way.

The SWCRS anniversary observation included a "Fireside Chat" session with SWCRS founders that necessitated scheduling the AAR plenary at noon on Saturday. The coincidence of the anniversary year for SWCRS, the first year for the new SWCRS Executive Director Richard Bautch, the first year for the new AAR Southwest Regional Coordinator Katherine Downey, the absence of the AAR-SW President and Vice President, and the residence of the AAR Southwest Regional Coordinator in the DFW area, made for many changes in this year's meeting.

#### **Meeting registration and attendance:**

#### **Business meeting:**

The 2014 AAR-SW Business Meeting was held at the Marriott DFW at 6:00p on Friday, March 7, whereas in previous years the Business Meeting had been held early Sunday morning of the conference weekend. There were a number of items needing discussion, hence more time than the Sunday morning typically allows, and it was thought that members might also be fresher before the conference. Members were notified by email twice in advance of the conference and provided with an agenda for the meeting. Nonetheless, attendance was light, and members throughout the weekend reported they had overlooked the email. Sufficient members, however, were in attendance, as was Susan Hill, Regions Director, to transact the business required, which was as follows:

- Treasurer's Report: Zero AV & Tech (all provided by Regional Coordinator's DFW-area school), lower Regional Coordinator expense (due to DFW residence), \$1000 special session expense to bring in former regional scholar – accolades for this sort of expense
- Formed a committee to draft the Policies & Procedures for the Southwest Region to support the Bylaws. Stacy Patty will chair the committee comprising Katherine Downey and Marc DiPaolo.
- Passed a motion to support financially the Southwest Region Student Director's participation in both the regional and national meetings. The Executive Committee will negotiate with the Student Director each year to provide adequate funding.
- Decided to support grad students with some sort of programming/reception next year coordinated by the Student Director, Regional Coordinator, and SWCRS Executive Director.
- Elected to AAR-SW Vice President Marc DiPaolo, Oklahoma City University

#### **Officers:**

Regional Coordinator: Katherine Downey, The Hockaday School

Past President: Jack Hill, Texas Christian University (As President this year, Jack was absent from the meeting, for he was on research leave in Aberdeen, Scotland. Allen Redmon filled in for him in the

Business Meeting and in introducing the plenary speaker. Next year, Jack will introduce the plenary speaker, Laurie Zoloth, who will then be AAR Past President.)

President: Allen Redmon, Texas A&M University, Central Texas

President-Elect: Jens Kreinath, Wichita State University

Vice President: Marc DiPaolo, Oklahoma City University

Student Director: BJ Parker, Baylor University

### **Challenges & Opportunities**

1. Graduate Student Programming: As indicated by the decision reported above, the abiding interest of the regional membership in programming sponsored by the AAR-SW for the benefit of the graduate students persists and became this year a proposal. It is of interest to SWCRS as well, and so several additional initiatives emerged:
  - a. Saturday evening student reception sponsored by SWCRS
  - b. New to SWCRS orientation Friday afternoon
  - c. Guidelines for presentations: Allen Redmon & Marc DiPaolo composing
  - d. Strong coordination with Student Director, BJ Parker
  - e. Invitation to Student Directors to observe SWCRS Directors meeting
2. Regional Leadership: Efforts initiated two years to foster interest in regional leadership and a competitive election process have flagged. Solicitations of interest made via email months in advance of the meeting produced only one response. The election process to the presidential line this year was essentially acclamation of a volunteer. There are concerns also with representation of discipline, experience, etc. I plan to recommend that this be one of the items the Policy & Procedures Committee address this year.
3. Of concern at SWCRS in general is participation of senior faculty in the region. Discussion at the anniversary "Fireside Chat" raised this theme directly. Graduate students now make up nearly half of the attendees and presenters at SWCRS, and senior faculty in the region typically do not attend the meeting. Those speaking at the "Fireside Chat" admonished senior faculty for not fully participating. AAR-SW will incorporate this appeal to senior faculty into the planning of next year's sessions.