

American Academy of Religion
Annual Business Meeting
San Diego
Sunday November 24
7:30 am Pacific Time

- I. President Jin Park called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m. with a quorum of 26 members present.
- II. The Agenda was approved by acclamation (Jin Park)
The Minutes from 2023 Annual Business meeting were approved by acclamation (Jin Park)
- III. Memorial List (ED Claudia Schippert)
 - Alfred Collins
 - Brian Mooney
 - Gaymon "Will" Bennett
 - Robert Brown
 - Tony Campolo
 - Forrest Clingerman
 - Gabriel Coless
 - Marc Ellis
 - Gustavo Gutierrez
 - Barbara Holmes
 - Robinson James
 - Michael Kogan
 - J. Michael McNeir-Clark
 - Kathryn Rabuzzi
 - Tony Stewart
 - William Stoker
 - Jack Verheyden

We remember these colleagues and offer condolences to their families and friends. If you know of others who should be added to this list, please contact AAR Executive Director Claudia Schippert (cschippert@aarweb.org).

- IV. President's Report to members (Jin Park).
Thanks to ED Claudia Schippert and the AAR staff.
The theme of this year's AM is Violence, Non-Violence and the Margins
- V. Treasurer's Report (Nadine Pence). Appendix A
- VI. Executive Director's Report (Claudia Schippert). Appendix B

- VII. Bylaw Changes (Schippert)
Changes listed in Appendix C have been approved by the Board of Directors, and notice was provided to all members on October 21, 2024.
Motion 1: to accept the bylaws changes described in Appendix C.
Motion approved by acclamation.
- VIII. 2024 Election Results (Schippert).
Vice President – Angela Sims; Treasurer – Nikia Robert; Status Committee Director – Heather White.
- IX. Passing of the Gavel – Jin Park to Leela Prasad
- X. 2025 Presidential Theme (Prasad) Appendix D.

Adjournment 8:45 AM

Respectfully submitted
Kathleen Sands
Secretary to the Board of Directors

Appendix A

Treasurer's Report

November 2024

Financials Statements:

A comparative review of the fiscal years ended 6/30/23 and 6/30/24 has been provided. Please note that the fiscal year ended 6/30/24 is reported based on interim (unaudited) financials. AAR's audit engagement for fiscal year 2024 began this year and is expected to conclude later this fiscal year. As you can see from the Statement of Activities, we had some variances in income and expenses when compared to FY23. This is mostly the result of the current unpredictability of one of our main revenue streams – Membership (Dues) – as well as the expected variations in revenues and expenses related to the Annual Meeting Expenses.

Investments:

As is consistent from year to year, we continue to anticipate fluctuations in the market value of our investment portfolio as the stock market continues to respond to wide-ranging economic forecasts. As of the date of this report, the total market value of our investment portfolio is \$6,878,018 which represents a \$494,126 decline in asset value since the end of 2023. During the fiscal year, in addition to market fluctuations, AAR has drawn from the portfolio in excess of the 5% prescribed in the spending policies adopted in 1994 and re-stated in 2002 to cover the fiscal year's projected operating deficit.

Changes in Market Value:

	12/31/2023	11/6/2024	Variance
Equity Securities	\$5,174,398.63	\$4,809,032.72	(\$365,365.91)
Mutual Funds	\$1,757,037.14	\$1,789,270.51	(\$32,233.37)
Money Market Funds	\$376,243.28	\$279,716.64	(\$96,526.64)
Total Asset Market Value:	\$7,307,688.19	\$6,878,017.87	(\$494,125.92)

Budgeting:

For the 2025 fiscal year (7/1/24 – 6/30/25), AAR's Board of Directors approved the organizational budget in June 2024. As with prior years, AAR continued to approach its fiscal planning by continuing to base its assumptions on the premise that revenues and expenses will return to approximately 80-85% of our actuals from pre-pandemic years with a focus the costs variations between different Annual Meeting host cities. For FY2025 planning, we used 2019 actuals from the San Diego meeting as a base for developing our projections.

The following tables illustrate the attendance and revenue variances between the 2022 (FY23) and 2023 (FY24) Annual Meetings:

Actual attendance variances:

	2022 – Denver	2023 – San Antonio	% Difference
AAR only	3397	3320	98%
SBL only	3147	3182	101%
Dual	700	742	106%

Total Attendance	7261	7,244	99%
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Actual AAR revenue variance

Revenue	2022 - Denver	2023 – San Antonio	\$ Variance	% Variance
AM Registration	\$810,727	\$827,770	\$17,043	102%
Membership	\$742,369	\$595,561	(\$146,808)	80%

These variances show that for FY2024 we were able to realize attendance at the Annual Meeting above our 80% projections. While our registration revenue shows \$17k+ over the previous year's meetings revenue, the variances in attendee registration by type (i.e. student, retired, professional, etc.), our interim registration revenue is estimated to be \$39,758 less than our FY2024 projections.

Additionally, this year's projections include an increase in expenses to support AAR's acquisition and deployment of new Association Management (AMS/member database) and Content Management (CMS/website) Systems to replace the poorly functioning and high-cost systems that are currently in place.

While we continue to be encouraged by the increase in attendance at post-pandemic in person meetings and the addition of the June sessions of the Annual Meeting and the potential related revenue increase, we remain cautious about the varying uncertainties that impact AAR's financial position as the field continues to change.

Prepared By: Nadine Pence, Board Treasurer
In collaboration with Nichol  D. Franklin, Chief Financial Officer/Chief Operations Officer

American Academy of Religion
Statement of Activities
For the Years Ending June 30, 2024 and 2023

	June 30, 2024*	June 30, 2023	\$Variance
Revenues			
Membership	\$595,561	\$742,369	(\$146,808)
Annual Meeting Registration	\$827,770	\$810,727	\$17,043
Annual Meeting Exhibits and Advertising	\$400,810	\$609,401	(\$208,591)
Annual Meeting Other	\$56,669	\$80,996	(\$24,327)
Publishing and Advertising	\$112,929	\$129,000	(\$16,071)
Employment Center	\$69,813	\$59,157	\$10,656
Contributions and Gift in Kind	\$20,120	\$19,746	\$374
Rental Income Luce	\$141,598	\$151,284	(\$9,686)
Investment Income	\$164,514	\$172,333	(\$7,819)
Other	\$545	\$1,582	(\$1,037)
Release from Restriction	\$798,912	\$461,371	\$337,541
Total Revenues	\$3,189,241	\$3,237,966	(\$48,725)
Expenses			
Personnel Expenses	\$1,707,365	\$1,689,577	\$17,788
Professional Fees	\$141,452	\$42,524	\$98,928
Annual Meeting Contractors	\$95,323	\$77,850	\$17,473
Meetings Catering and Services	\$303,458	\$356,838	(\$53,380)
Advertising and Promotion	\$1,235	\$2,782	(\$1,547)
Occupancy	\$147,589	\$127,787	\$19,802
Office Expenses	\$87,855	\$97,129	(\$9,274)
Computer Operations	\$389,473	\$345,649	\$43,824
Equipment and Maintenance	\$3,050	\$3,133	(\$83)
Meetings and Travel	\$137,251	\$115,601	\$21,650
Bank and Credit Card Fees	\$59,307	\$54,276	\$5,031
Grants, Awards and Subventions	\$279,702	\$310,918	(\$31,216)
Emory Svc Fees, Misc and Waivers	\$105,215	\$81,869	\$23,346
Total Expenses	\$3,458,275	\$3,305,933	\$152,342
Net Operating Revenues and Expenses	(\$269,034)	(\$67,967)	(\$201,067)
Other Revenues and Expenses			
Gains or Losses on Investments	\$692,999	\$491,304	\$201,695
Regions net Revenues and Expense	\$4,472	(\$16,617)	\$21,089
Depreciation	(\$183,621)	(\$116,989)	(\$66,632)
Total Other Revenues and Expenses	\$513,850	\$357,698	\$156,152
Total Net Revenues and Expenses	\$244,816	\$289,731	(\$44,915)

*Interim Financials/Audited Statements Pending

Annual Business Meeting

November 2024

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION

Statements of Financial Position

As of June 30, 2024 and 2023

	June 30, 2024*	June 30, 2023	\$Variance
Assets			
Cash and cash equivalents	\$992,950	\$804,371	\$188,579
Marketable securities	\$7,039,165	\$7,651,404	(\$612,239)
Accounts receivable, net	\$138,488	\$73,891	\$64,597
Prepaid expenses	\$62,962	\$105,432	(\$42,470)
Furniture and equipment, net	\$132,993	\$56,464	\$76,529
Share of Luce Center assets, net	\$2,032,292	\$1,973,675	\$58,617
Total Assets	\$10,398,851	\$10,665,237	(\$266,386)
Liabilities			
Accounts payable, accrued expenses	\$57,662	\$766,357	(\$708,695)
Deferred revenue memberships	\$207,113	\$249,645	(\$42,532)
Deferred revenue rent	\$5,408	\$0	\$5,408
Deferred revenue annual meeting	\$263,497	\$480,643	(\$217,146)
PPP note payable	\$0	\$215,723	(\$215,723)
Total Liabilities	\$533,681	\$1,712,368	(\$1,178,687)
Net Assets			
Net assets	\$9,620,354	\$10,165,900	\$ (545,546)
Current Year Net Income	\$244,816	(\$1,213,031)	\$1,457,847
Total Net Assets	\$9,865,170	\$8,952,869	\$912,301
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$10,398,851	\$10,665,237	(\$266,386)

*Interim Financials/Audited Statements Pending

Annual Business Meeting

November 2024

Appendix B

ED Report for 2024 Annual Meeting for ABM

The AAR is a membership organization, i.e. we exist for and are run by our members. A small (but mighty) staff supports the strategic direction set by the elected Board of Directors, aided by hundreds of volunteers who serve as leaders of Program Units, on committees or working groups. This past year has seen success in new and ongoing initiatives and also has presented ongoing challenges. At this historical moment, we face significant, and anticipate further, challenges but we also see great opportunities to respond to the changes in the field and the world.

Membership – AAR has 6000 members who are actively involved - by participating in year round programming and through Program Units, serving on many committees and taskforces (more than 400 involved) or participating in offered programming or grant programs. We will soon officially launch Organizational and Institutional Membership – these include discounts and benefits for organizations and institutions, including a particular number (depending on the level chosen) membership for students and professionals.

Regions – might become more important as we collectively respond to the many challenges and opportunities.

The reorganization to bring all regions under common operating procedures are complete. Regional leaders are now implementing some of the necessary changes. These include a more accessible and equitable regional election process and greater transparency within the regions' governance and programming. We hope that procedural changes will contribute to increasing regional member involvement and we look forward to strengthened the important meaningful regional programming.

Programming has expanded significantly beyond the November annual meeting. We are seeking to provide greater access for more current (and potential future) members. Enhanced programming also expands the type of resources and contributions we can offer to an increasingly diversifying membership and respond to current needs.

- **Year Round Programming**

Started in late 2023, we have expanded our offering of webinAARs in 2024. Recordings are available to view afterwards – some publicly and most for member-only access.

We regularly schedule several webinAARs each month and are encouraging committees constituent groups and Program Units to be(come) active in adding programming.

- **Added (inaugural) June Sessions of the Annual Meeting**

Online June sessions-> inaugural sessions took place June 25-27, 2024. During the online meeting, we offered 67 sessions over three (3) days, including papers sessions, roundtables, committee meetings, a plenary event, and films. Approximately 250 AAR members participated

as panelists, paper presenters, and presiders. 410 were registered overall. We had 50 program units/seminars participating and 10 committee sessions (these include both open sessions and closed meetings). In addition to sessions, we offered an Online Scholars (Zoom) Lounge that seemed useful for continuing conversations and used frequently over the three days. The June Meeting went well and we plan to hold next year's June session June 24-26, 2025 with June 23 as a public session/workshop addition.

- **San Diego Annual Meeting**

As is obvious, the Hilton strike has been resolved, but it took a lot of planning behind the scenes to prepare for potential shifts of locations. Thankfully, we did not need to activate those plans fully.

According to yesterday's report, 7760 registrations (SBL and AAR combined)- the highest number since the pandemic.

- **5 Issues I worry about in the context of our large in person meeting:**

- Skyrocketing cost of AV and FnB. (This AM: Our Joint-with-SBL AV cost is more than half a million! AV cost: \$121,253.29(AAR only) + \$166,694.83(half of joint) = \$287,948.12 (plus some additional late adds -> **AAR pays ca. \$290K for AV this meeting.**
- Food and Beverage costs continue to be ridiculously high. Some adjustments have already happened and more might need to happen. Here as elsewhere, we need to reevaluate if we can and should continue to do things the way they have been done or whether we need to adjust to new realities.
- Decreasing access for our members - in face of increasing political and economic challenges and precarity.
- Number of sessions – while contributing to the expansive offerings at this Annual Meeting, the huge number of sessions to be scheduled is becoming unsustainable in a number of ways. A first small reduction to Tier 4+5 units has been instituted for 2025 by the Program Committee, but there is more work to be done in adjusting our in person annual meeting to the new post-pandemic etc. realities.
- How to create non-competing space to schedule all of our priorities (i.e. in addition to providing opportunities to present and discuss research and exhibit books, how can we include professional development and public understanding of religion in ways that signal our taking it seriously (not just an add-on).

Employment Services. We continue to maintain (in collab with SBL) our job board advertising open positions. We have removed the member requirement for viewing available job postings, making the resource accessible to all – and rendering greater value to institutions posting available employment opportunities. We are also continuing to expand our professional development programming in order to respond to changes in the field and in recognition of increasing career diversity of our members.

Grants and Awards:

- In 2024, we have awarded 15 awards and 72 grants total – awarding ~ \$ 230K

While we continue to view the support of our members' research as important function of our guild, it has become clear that we must reevaluate our grant and awards programs in order to

better fulfill our mission and to respond to changed fiscal realities as well as the changing nature of our field.

Therefore, the Board yesterday authorized a one year pause in most award and grant programs in order to allow a formal review and revision, as relevant, to the AAR's Award and Grant Programs. This pause will not affect Annual Meeting travel grants. We will also continue the book awards as usual in 2025 but will then reevaluate the existing submission categories in light of our mission and charge in the following year.

Publications:

- JAAR: JAAR has continued to work on catching up with the previous backlog. The average time from article submission to publication has been drastically reduced (from 44 and 45 days in 2022 and 2023 to less than 19 days in 2024.) JAAR is going to be fully online – no more print copies – as of January 2025. (This decision was made by OUP.)
- Reading Religion had a great year. In 2024, 316 reviews have been published. Over 3000 newsletter subscribers and around 5000 followers on social media (X and FB) receive regular information about published reviews, featured reading lists, and the around 1250 available books for review. The new 'four books' review essays (six published in 2024) continue to be popular and will be appearing monthly in 2025. Workshops on 'how to write a compelling book review' were offered, and a recent webinar on reviewing and being reviewed offered insightful conversations. Monthly reading list recommendations (for Black History Month, Earth Month, etc.) We have added a donation opportunity to the RR website and are starting more targeted donation requests to sustain this publicly accessible resource offering accessible review of scholarly work.
- Religious Studies News and our various social media outputs are continuing to keep members and other informed, and we are also reconfiguring our overall approach in the context of the redesign of our website and CMS (content management system).

AMS and CMS – while not visible to our members, AAR staff has been working hard to identify, contract, and now implement new Management systems and a new website. Both are scheduled to launch in early March 2025 and will improve operational efficiency, enable us to offer more and better resources, and will also enhance the user/member experience and communication.

If you noticed any of my colleagues among AAR staff sigh or roll their eyes when I mentioned AMS/CMS, that is because of the incredible amount of time, resources, and cost involved in this transition.

Public Understanding of Religion

- Ever increasing in importance, we need to foreground and support this second half of our mission statement. Translating the rich knowledge and expertise our members collectively offer into various public realms, supporting committee engaged and public facing scholarship is going to be more essential than ever in the coming years.

- Guidelines Taskforce: A taskforce instituted early this year has worked hard (thank you Rachel Mikva) on producing guidelines for the valuing and evaluation of Public scholarship in religion. A first draft of the guidelines is accessible online and the committee has requested feedback from members. I expect them to be able to present the to the January Board Meeting.
- We have benefitted from the support of the Henry Luce foundation and collaboration with the ACLS and NHA.
- We were able to feature some of the excellent work out grant recipients have done in community engaged work at the recent NHC and are engaged in a new collaboration with ACLS and NHA around 'mapping public religion work'. Also note that we have an identified 'track' of public scholarship in this conference as well as a well attended networking reception for publicly engaged scholars last night.

The state of the field, Advocacy and Collaboration with other Organizations

- Crisis of REL Departments ->
We have responded to requests for letters of support and have provided some resources to struggling colleagues. ARC is also rolling out the REL toolbox (housed at U of Alabama)- see member news and RSN article by Russ McCutcheon about this.
- Strategic Planning Taskforce is continuing and will likely have an interim report for the January meeting.
- Give the anticipated further and strengthening attacks on higher education and academic freedom, we anticipate many opportunities for advocacy for our discipline, on a number of levels, requiring all of us to participate, as is appropriate or possible for our individual situations.

Thank you for participating in and contributing to our important mission in the past year – While occasionally it seems a bit daunting, I look forward to continuing this important work together with you all.

Appendix C

Bylaw changes



Special Notice to the AAR Membership

To: Members of the American Academy of Religion

From: Claudia Schippert, Executive Director

Subject: Proposed Changes to the AAR Bylaws

Date: October 21, 2024

After careful consideration, the Board of Directors unanimously recommended several revisions to the [AAR bylaws](#).

The bylaws outline how revisions and amendments are to be handled:

Article X. Amendment

These bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the entire Board of Directors, followed by a two-thirds majority vote of the Members present and voting at a meeting of the Members, or by electronic ballot. Notice of the proposed revisions and meeting shall be distributed to all Members of the Academy at least thirty days (30) prior to the meeting at which they are to be considered.

With this memo, the Board provides the AAR membership notice of proposed revisions, as well as its intention to bring these proposed revisions to a vote at the AAR's Annual Business Meeting. **The Annual Business Meeting (A24-100) will be held on Sunday, November 24, 2024, from 7:30 AM to 8:45 AM, in San Diego, California.** Please join us at the Annual Business Meeting to discuss and vote on these bylaws revisions.

The proposed bylaws changes are specified below. The actual change in text is provided for each revision. A strikethrough font (~~like this~~) indicates passages or text to be deleted. An underlined, red font (like this) represents new text or passages to be added.

Proposed Bylaws Revisions

Bylaws of the American Academy of Religion

Approved October 31, 2010 (Amended 2011, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2023)

Article V. Board of Directors

Section 5. Regions Director.

The Regions Director must be a Member with experience in the leadership of an AAR Region as a ~~Regionally Elected Coordinator, President, Vice President, or another~~ regionally elected officer. The Regions Director shall serve a term of three years and may not serve an additional consecutive term as Regions Director.

Article VII. Committees of the Board and Working Groups

Part I. Committees of the Board

Section 2. Finance and Audit Committee.

The Finance and Audit Committee shall oversee the financial aspects of the AAR including the annual budget, investments, and fiscal planning and shall review the annual audit and tax filings, recommending, as appropriate, its acceptance by the Board. Membership shall include the President-Elect, one At-Large Director and three Members who are not on the Board of Directors, one of whom could be a non-AAR member, with experience in business management, financial and/or investment oversight ~~and the AAR Executive Director~~. The Chief Finance Officer/Chief Operating Officer shall staff the Committee. The Finance and Audit Committee is chaired by the Treasurer.

Article VIII. Regional Groups

Section 2. Governance.

Each region shall establish a regional board of directors that is subject to the authority of the AAR Board of Directors. Each regional group shall maintain a record of its activities, and the ~~Regionally Elected Coordinator~~ **Chief Regional Officer** shall submit an Annual Report with financial statements to the Executive Director **or their designee**. Regional directors and officers must be AAR Members. Any Member of a region may hold office or vote in that region's elections. Elections will be conducted by the AAR Office by electronic ballot distributed to all Members eligible to vote at the address on file at the AAR Office. ~~In circumstances where the electronic ballot cannot be distributed, regional elections may be held in person at the region's business meeting.~~

Appendix D

2025 AAR Presidential Theme
Leela Prasad, Brown University

Freedom

I invite the AAR to reflect on what is perhaps the most desired and at the same time, the most contentious condition in history: Freedom.

Folk poetic imagination of the Tamil country of South India tells the story of Veerapandiya Kattabomman, a proud South Indian chief who was captured and hung by the British East India Company in 1799 for refusing to pay tribute. Ballads resonate with the spirit of his defiance: "Freedom is not yours to give or take; my people are always free." We have heard echoes of this spirit in other places and times, and in our own lives.

Today, assaults on freedom and human rights are rampant, ruthless, and recurring. Ironically, some of these assaults are done in the name of freedom, co-opting the language of freedom. We witness states bulldozing homes and humans, societies enslaving peoples and muffling voices, and laws invading bodies. We live in democracies that regard imprisonment as a solution. Yet, even when freedom is imperiled, the hunger for it drives life itself. Poets, storytellers, philosophers, and other visionaries affirm freedoms that can never be taken. They remind us of inner playgrounds that remain sovereign. They inspire us to wonder whether the mountains, the forests, the deserts and the oceans are free. Like Joshua Brian Campbell and Cynthia Erivo, they tell us to keep asking, “Far across the river, can you hear freedom calling?”

So, let us ask ourselves questions that we have asked before but let us ask them with new sensibilities that allow us to draw on the past, be haunted by our times, and search anew. Who decides who or what is free; for how long? Where is freedom preserved, where is it lost? Do we agree with Kris Kristofferson’s line, made famous by Janis Joplin: “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose”? Can there be freedom without justice? Does, or should, freedom equal material and emotional well-being? How does one reconcile competing senses of freedom? We can ponder how freedoms and un-freedoms are entwined: Am I free if my freedom has come from the silencing or persecution of others (who, too, seek the freedom to worship, to earn a wage, to live with dignity, to love whom they choose, to laugh, to grieve, and so on)? What makes me believe I am free when not all of us are free? How is the human claim to freedom entangled with other life-forms—are there consequences to this entanglement? Relatedly, is freedom the right of all species? If freedom is temporal, when does a subject *feel* free? What, in the end, is the lived meaning of freedom?

AAR’s members are invited to explore throughout this year the imaginary of freedom in its widest sense: across traditions and religions, practices and policies, art and ecology, and poetry and performance. I hope that our deliberations can help chart pathways for understanding and ensuring a distant but visible and viable horizon of freedom for all.