

Working Group Report to Business Meeting
Carl Holladay
August 7, 2018

First, let me thank the members of the Working Group for their hard work on behalf of the entire Society over the last year, and since we are asking for your feedback at this meeting, let me introduce the members of the Working Group:

Andrew Clarke

Judith Gundry

Christina Maria Kreinecker

Bill Loader

Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole

You are invited to give your feedback to any one of them, or to any of the Officers of the Society, or to any member of the Committee.

As we began our work, we spent some time clarifying the mission of SNTS and identifying our core values. The Society's constitutional aim is simply stated: "the furtherance of New Testament studies internationally, including within its interests charitable initiatives."

To guide our discussion, we identified three core values that have guided the Society since its inception: (1) scholarship at an advanced level; (2) collegiality; (3) individual initiative; and (4) international scope combined with multilingual discourse. These core values are reflected in the policies and procedures that govern the Society's decisions and practices. Throughout our deliberations, awareness of these core values informed our discussion of specific issues and proposals for change.

Our discussion focused on three main areas: (1) Membership; (2) the General Meeting; (3) International Initiatives.

Membership

Feedback from the 2017 Survey indicated a strong consensus that the high standards for membership should not change. This reaffirms the core conviction that the Society exists in order to foster scholarship at an advanced level. The Survey and extensive discussions among members suggest that, as the Society moves forward, its overall configuration of membership should change.

Specifically,

- the median age of members should be lower;
- the percentage of women and ethnic minorities should be higher;
- the percentage of members from geographical regions beyond Western Europe and North America should be higher;

- there should be greater representation of theories, methodologies, and research that reflect the full breadth of current research related to the New Testament and Christian origins.

To achieve these goals, we focused on two proposals: (1) introducing a new category of membership called Associate Membership, in which a person could be nominated for membership at an earlier stage of their career, and over time, with additional publications, become a Full Member; and (2) modifying the current policies relating to Guests.

After extensive discussion in which we evaluated the relative merits of each proposal and their long-term implications for the Society, the Committee believes that a multi-pronged approach is needed in order to achieve the goals outlined above.

First, members of the Society should continue to be encouraged to adopt a pro-active policy of nominating new members. It is imperative that current members identify scholars, especially younger scholars of diverse backgrounds, mentor them as appropriate, and nominate them for membership. This initiative should be given high priority at the General Meetings and in the Newsletters for the next five years.

Secondly, the current guest policy should be modified to be less restrictive and thus more effective as a mechanism for attracting new members to the Society--for example, that an individual may be invited as a guest up to two times within a four-year period, and no more than three times within a ten-year period. Moreover, we recommend that those who invite guests, especially as presenters or participants in Seminars, assess their interest and readiness to become members of the Society; and, when appropriate, take responsibility for nominating them for membership.

Thirdly, the Committee will re-evaluate the current criteria for membership to ensure that full credit is given to scholarly articles of high quality that have been published in collections of essays or in other forms such as digital publications, where they are clearly the equivalent of an article in a peer-reviewed, international journal.

Fourthly, recognizing the energy and enthusiasm that have arisen over the last two years pertaining to the possibility of Associate Membership, we recommend that specific models for Associate Membership and recommendations be brought to the 2019 Marburg Meeting.

Here, our discussions focused on four areas: (1) Structure of the Main or plenary papers and Short papers; (2) Languages; (3) Seminars; and (4) Issues relating to decisions by the Local Organizing Committee in planning and organizing the General Meeting

(1) Main and Short papers

As we have reflected on the overall structure of the Main and Short papers, we think there should be more opportunities for members to read papers at the General Meeting. The Committee believes there is good reason to shift from the current format of four ninety-minute papers to a new format featuring six sixty-minute papers; and that this revised structure be implemented at the General Meeting in 2021. Such a change would not only give more opportunities for members to read papers, but it would also increase the possibility for greater diversity (gender, age, ethnic, geographical, and topical) in the plenary sessions.

Recognizing the impact that such changes would have to the overall ethos and structure of the General Meeting, the Committee also agreed to re-examine the process by which presenters and topics for Main papers are identified, and find ways to solicit suggestions from the wider membership that could then be forwarded to the sub-committee making these proposals.

(2) Languages

We discussed our current practice of having papers in English, German, and French, and we explored the possibility of having papers read in other languages. We recognize that, as the Society becomes more international in its membership, the number of languages in which members are fluent will increase, and that this will bring added pressure to provide opportunities for papers to be presented in more languages. We discussed the practical difficulties this would entail, and the potential value of a member giving a paper in a language other than one of the three established languages. In keeping with our core value that the Society is not only international in scope but also multilingual in practice, the Committee believes that it is advantageous to retain our current practice of inviting papers in English, German, or French. Although English has become the *de facto lingua franca* of international discourse, we do not think it advisable to move toward a practice of having all the papers in English.

(3) Seminars

Responses from the Members Survey and other feedback underscore the central importance of the Seminars as one of the most valuable components of the General Meeting. The Committee believes that the current structure of the Seminars should be retained. While our Seminars address a variety of topics relating to NT studies, the Committee is convinced that we need additional Seminars that actually reflect the full range of current research relating to the

New Testament and Christian origins. In order to achieve this, we, as members, may need to identify such topics and recruit Society members who might be encouraged to organize new Seminars that broaden the scope of topics regularly discussed at the General Meeting.

In our discussion of Seminars, we identified several issues that the Committee needs to address:

- being more attentive to decisions about renewing Seminars;
- possibly limiting the overall length of time a Seminar can run, for example, renewal for only one five-year period;
- finding a balance between traditional, perennial Seminars such as Textual Criticism or The Language of the NT, and more occasional Seminars that pursue special topics;
- reminding members that Seminar topics can extend beyond the NT canon;
- possibly making Seminar papers available to the whole Society, either electronically or as a collection of distributed papers;
- explaining to Society members, especially new members, perhaps on the website, or in the Business Meeting or the Newsletters, how the Seminars function within the Society—how new Seminars are formed and how already running Seminars are renewed.

(4) Issues Relating to Planning and Organizing the General Meeting

From the Survey and other feedback, two issues relating to the General Meeting are frequently mentioned: (1) the cost of attending, and (2) the desire for members to have greater autonomy in selecting the parts of the General Meeting Program in which to participate.

As for the cost of attending, the Committee thinks the actual costs of registration for members and accompanying persons tend to be broadly comparable with other conferences. Typically, different options for housing are available, ranging from inexpensive dormitory rooms, or other forms of university housing, to four- and five-star hotels. The major differential relates to travel costs, depending on where one lives in relation to the meeting location, which changes from year to year. On the whole, the Committee believes the costs of attending the General Meeting have not been excessive, especially since the registration fee includes meals and all refreshments for the four-day period. Moreover, we think that, given the benefits members experience from the General Meeting, the financial costs represent reasonable value.

The Committee also recognizes the complexity of this set of issues as they relate to particular locations, and to the work of the Local Organizing Committee. Over the years, the Secretary has worked closely with LOCs in planning the General Meeting, emphasizing the need to use conservative estimates of

projected attendance and to develop budgets that ensure against financial losses. Suggestions from Society members urging LOCs to limit activities such as lavish dinners or expensive social events are regularly forwarded to the LOC by the Secretary, but we recognize that most of these decisions are finally made by the LOC, as they seek to plan a sustainable Program that will attract delegates. We are also aware that evening events are sometimes subsidized or covered by sponsorship, or provided free of charge by the hosting institution. We also know that many delegates regard these events as an attractive, distinctive feature of the Society.

The Committee reaffirms the strong social benefits of the current structure—four days of meetings, followed by the option of a Saturday excursion, with many opportunities for social interaction throughout the week. We think this overall experience distinguishes the SNTS General Meeting from other professional societies such as SBL. This current structure and ethos of the General Meeting are also an expression of one of our most cherished values—collegiality and social bonding—in which members, over time, can develop working relationships, even close friendships, with other members, sometimes resulting in substantial scholarly collaboration.

The desire for members to have greater autonomy in choosing to participate in only certain parts of the General Meeting, for example, only the accommodations but not the meals, is difficult to achieve, given our tradition of using LOCs to organize and plan the General Meeting. After all, the overall budget is reached through various levels of negotiations with the hosting university, along with a number of other institutions such as hotels and restaurants, and economies of scale can only be achieved through such negotiations. Given the way in which the SBL Annual Meeting is organized, it makes sense for individuals to choose their own accommodations, to arrange for their own meals, and to decide what aspects of the locale to visit. But this flexibility does not exist, nor is it likely to occur, in the current configuration of the SNTS General Meeting. The Committee supports the current arrangement, which consists of a single, comprehensive registration package, with some limited options relating to tours and excursions. We also believe that, over time, increasing options for members to participate in selected parts of the General Meeting program would have a negative impact on the collegiality of the Society.

International Initiatives

Our Working Group discussed the crucial importance of the Society's International Initiatives as they have been coordinated by the Assistant Secretary for International Initiatives, and as they have been carried out by the four Regional Liaison Committees. The Committee believes these initiatives have

been effective in extending the Society's reach and influence in different parts of the world. Our confidence stems from the recognition that the Society, in its origin and development, has tended to be western European and North American in its membership and outlook, and that conscious effort has been required, especially since the 1990s, to develop a more inclusive outlook and membership. These efforts have also stemmed from the Society's recognition that important scholarly work relating to the NT occurs in many different parts of the world, and that the Society needs to be pro-active in promoting such scholarship, and, as it does in all aspects of its work, in identifying younger NT scholars throughout the world, mentoring them in appropriate ways, and assisting them in becoming members of SNTS. The Society's position in this regard can be succinctly stated: Do not exclude people from the Society who should be included.

The Committee recognizes that some SNTS members still do not fully comprehend the importance and scope of the work carried out under the auspices of the Regional Liaison Committees. Accordingly, we must continue to report on these initiatives at the General Meeting and in the Newsletters, as well as on the website. We must also remind members that the General Meeting is not the only public face of the Society, but that the Society is also visibly present in the various activities and meetings of the Regional Liaison Committees. We think it vital to maintain the practice of regional meetings, along with periodic pre-conference meetings in which NT scholars from a particular region can present their work, and subsequently attend that General Meeting.

The Committee also discussed some of the special challenges facing the Regional Liaison Committees, one of the most important being travel costs, along with other related costs, in enabling members to participate in regional activities and conferences. The practice of organizing meetings of NT scholars in various parts of the world, Africa, for example, has gone well. Naturally, this is an important means of identifying and attracting scholars who should be members of SNTS. We need to find ways to fund the activities, especially the travel expenses, of scholars in those areas in which our Regional Liaison Committees function, recognizing that this is one of the key ways of identifying younger scholars who might eventually become members of the Society.

Conclusion

As you can see, the Officers and Committee, along with other Society members, have been hard at work over the last two years in responding to Judith Lieu's invitation in Montreal for us to reflect on who we are as a Society and who we want to be; to re-evaluate our purpose and envision our long-term future; and to

think creatively about the policies, procedures, and structures that will enable us to fulfill our mission.

We deeply appreciate the responses and suggestions we have already received from many of you, and we solicit your feedback to this report and to the Committee's proposals for change. We are happy to receive your responses in either oral or written form. If you prefer to email one (or all) of us, you are welcome to do so.