
BUSINESS REPORTS

Association Update

Brenda Bailey-Hainer, Executive Director, Atla

This is traditionally the time when I provide an update on the Association and talk about the state of Atla's finances, the work of staff and committees, and major accomplishments from the past year. Then I go on to say a few words about what is planned for the next fiscal year.

Today my comments on what has been accomplished will be positive but brief. Atla is doing well. Revenues last year exceeded the budgeted amount, and expenses were less than projected. You just heard that the balance in the Endowment Fund is good—and can continue to grow even more with the help of your donations.

Our membership numbers are steady, and I'm encouraged by all the faces I see here in the room that are new to me and the roster of online attendees that includes both long-time members and others who joined just in the last few months. Volunteers on our committees, task forces, and editorial boards did a stellar job of providing a broad array of webinars, workshops, publications, and guided conversations. Our staff worked with the conference committee to make last year's online conference—and this year's hybrid experience—a great success. Atla's open-access press published more books and journals on theological librarianship and related topics. Yes, Atla survived the last two years of the pandemic and is doing well.

All of this information plus the many supporting details will be published in my column in the July 2022 *Atla Newsletter*.

This year, however, I'm doing something a little different with the rest of my time.

By now, you may have heard that I will be retiring soon. This is my last *Atla Annual* as Executive Director. It's been eleven and a half years since I joined Atla. My first Atla experience was a board meeting in Chicago in January two weeks after I started. Talk about hazing!!! My first Atla conference was in Chicago in 2011. Even though I had worked in academic libraries and with librarians of all types and in the information industry across North America and internationally for a couple decades, almost all of the attendees there were new to me. But everyone was friendly and enthusiastic.

In some ways, it feels like I've been part of the Atla family forever now. Since Atla board members can serve two consecutive three-year terms, or six years, I think about my tenure here as equal to just about two full generations of boards.

I still think fondly and gratefully of all the board presidents who nurtured me, starting with Laura Wood, John Weaver, Andy Keck, Beth Bidlack, Kelly Campbell, Matt Ostercamp, Jennie Bartholomew, Stephen Sweeney, Christina Torbert, and finally—at least for the last half an hour or so—Jérémie LeBlanc. Each of them helped me in their own unique way, and I appreciated their patience with me as I learned about theological libraries and librarianship.

The Atla Executive Director position is a complex job. It means tracking and being conversant not just in theological librarianship and theological education, but also academic library trends, the information industry, nonprofit best practices, and association management. But no matter where I turned my attention, I found a welcoming community eager to collaborate and cooperate.

I can't sing enough praise for my colleagues at peer organizations that also produce humanities databases. They welcomed me into their circle, and I was fortunate enough to serve on the board of NFAIS (now part of NISO), the professional association for those of us creating indexes, databases, and discovery tools. In particular, I have appreciated the partnership and support of EBSCO—especially our primary liaison, Ryan Bernier. It has been such a wonderful collaboration both on a professional and a personal level.

Other professional collaborations that supported me aren't represented here today. The now retired Executive Director of the Theological Book Network, Nancy Arnison, invited me to serve on the TBN board. It was a rich and educational experience, especially our board trip to Ghana where we visited theological seminaries. A side trip to the El Mina slave castle along the coast was a life-changing experi-

ence for all of us. Others are Jay Blossom, formerly the editor of *In Trust* magazine; Deena Pence from the Wabash Center, who retired a few years ago; John Kutsko at the Society for Biblical Literature; our publisher partners, some of whom exhibited here; but also the hundreds of others who offer their content through Atlas® and Atlas PLUS®. Sadly, not all of them made it through the pandemic. I especially miss Paul Peeters, who was the Executive Director of Peeters Publishers in Louvain, Belgium.

Because Atla has such a long history, I often am not familiar with the people we honor in the memorials each year since their active membership predated me. But there are many I did have personal knowledge of. I miss Lorraine Olley, who always raised her hand during the Association Update and asked hard budget questions. And Melody McMahan, who was an advocate for scholarly communication and publishing: she served on the Atla board and used her editing skills to apply the Chicago Manual of Style to the Board Policy Manual. Atla may be the only association with an official style manual! Finally, I mourn the loss of Don Vorp, who was a strong supporter for the research that Ithaka S&R did with Atla members on the habits of researchers in our field.

And I will cherish the many connections I made with current Atla members who shared their personal selves with me as we made special connections over diverse topics like science fiction, the blues, scarves, eclectic music, Iceland, cats, and museums.

In addition to the trip to Ghana, I had many other amazing experiences as part of my work. One of the most memorable was attending the Parliament of the World's Religions in Salt Lake City. The fall board meeting was held there so all could experience it by attending sessions and listening to music related to the spectrum of religions represented there. The BETH conferences in Europe, the ForATL conferences in southeast Asia, and ANZTLA conferences in Australia and New Zealand all helped forge strong international connections.

None of Atla's achievements would be possible without the many talented staff. When you come to conference or attend webinars, you see Denise, Christy, Christine, Jamie, John, Tawny, Gregg, and many others over the years. But in addition to all of them, there are so many others who work behind the scenes in metadata analysis, technology, finance, marketing, IT, and HR. Atla's success is not possible without them.

At the board meeting earlier this week, I was asked about the accomplishments of which I am most proud. It's not terribly sexy, but infrastructure seems to have been my forte. I fly a lot, so I always hear the safety instructions in my head: "Secure your own oxygen mask before helping others." It was important to ensure that Atla was financially self-sustaining first, so that we have the strength and resources to support our members and collaborative activities with others.

So, here's my list:

- A new software platform to support production of the Atla products
- Association management software, new website, new accounting software to support our work with members and business partners
- Working with the board on the vision, core values, and core purpose developed in 2015, with the resulting bylaws changes and rebranding that helped make it a reality
- Downsizing Atla's physical footprint so we are spending significantly less on rented real estate and are able to shift those funds to other uses
- Starting the scholarly communication efforts under the new vision, including the digital library and the open press
- Expanded and improved diversity of content in Atla products
- And most of all, building a strong leadership team—Margot Lyon, Maria Stanton, Gillian Harrison Cain, Jim Butler, and Chad Handshy

All in all, I'm confident I'm leaving the association in a good place.

What didn't I get done? A lot! And I'm especially wistful about leaving since being so inspired by Tony Zander's keynote address yesterday. There are so many more exciting opportunities for transforming the work of theological and religious studies librarianship in the future!

But there always comes a time when it feels like it's the right time to move on and make way for the next generation of energetic and passionate leadership. I think a lot about the role of people who do the prep work for what is to come. As a music lover, I often think of

the timpani player leaning over to tune, gently tapping and adjusting the pitch, before the symphony begins.

Anyone here a hockey fan? I now realize that I've been the Atla Zamboni driver, moving in ever narrower concentric circles on the ice, sweeping the surface, preparing the rink so that the next generation of Atla leadership has smooth skating ahead. And now I can step aside and watch from the spectator seats to see what great things Atla accomplishes in the future.

Thank you.