
COMMITTEE & TASK FORCE REPORTS

Conference

Denise McFarlin, Atla Staff Liaison

Erica Durham, Chair

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Erica Durham, Columbia Theological Seminary, Chair
- Cindy Aalders, Regent College
- Robert Burgess, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
- Christopher Spilker, Sacred Heart Major Seminary
- Vance Thomas, Central Baptist Theological Seminary
- Kris Veldheer, Catholic Theological Union
- Megan Welsh, University of Colorado Boulder
- Gillian Harrison Cain, Atla Director of Member Programs
- Denise McFarlin, Atla Staff Liaison

REPORT ON ATLA ANNUAL 2020

The Familiar

by Denise McFarlin

The Conference Committee met in Detroit, Michigan, to plan and select the proposal sessions that would be presented at Atla Annual 2020. Our annual gathering for the Fall Planning Committee Meeting was held in October 2019. Of course, we made all the necessary decisions that allowed us to implement a compelling conference

experience. We toured and marveled at the glorious restoration of the Westin Book Cadillac Hotel function space; we selected 55 concurrent sessions; we devised a great plan for updating the proposal submission process; we discussed the potential for future webinars to further highlight and expand on sessions that would be of global interest to those unable to attend; we also did a brief walk to explore downtown Detroit and were delighted to see numerous restaurants and other attractions that would appeal to all attendees. Did we mention that, for the first time in history, the North American International Auto Show was being held in June in Detroit (which included the dates of our conference), literally steps from where we were meeting? We determined that, for any follow-up activities, we would meet via a conference call (Zoom had not become ubiquitous) to discuss any last-minute updates regarding Atla Annual. We returned to our respective cities feeling good about the plans we had devised. We were prepared and ready. Instead . . .

We watched and saw the familiar change daily; we all watched and felt the realization of being in a pandemic of COVID-19; we watched as others made the pivot (the second most ubiquitous word), and we made the pivot to . . .

The New Familiar

by Erica Durham

We went from Detroit, Michigan, to homes, offices, and couches in Australia, India, Canada, Indonesia, Kenya, Germany, Austria, Fiji, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. We went from chatting with colleagues over delicious snacks to eating lunch with our microphones muted while listening to speakers. We went from using Yelp to find an excellent restaurant to using Sched to find the next Zoom room. And we did it with the resilience and good nature so commonly found amongst theological librarians!

Four hundred thirty-four inquiring minds, devoted Association members, and first-time attendees gathered for thirty-nine concurrent sessions over three days. What a whirlwind!

So many aspects of the conference were already big changes for us: trying to remember to say Atla instead of “A-T-L-A,” Sched instead of “SKEDG” (or am I the only person who can’t seem to get that straight?), and operating in the Central Time Zone while living in India Standard Time. But so many things were familiar: familiar names, familiar hands being raised, familiar faces welcoming us to sessions, and familiar exhaustion at the end of each day.

Presenters did a wonderful job condensing forty-five-minute sessions into thirty minutes, turning discussion groups into virtual shared experiences, and transforming engaging face-to-face poster sessions into high-level online content. Two plenary speakers shared practical strategies for increasing hospitality and inclusion and the promise of transformation through deliberate, intensive, interfaith work.

We are thankful for the four sponsors of the conference (Atla Products, EBSCO, Digitalia, and OCLC). We were enriched by the participation from members of the Association of Jewish Libraries, the Catholic Library Association, and the Catholic Research Resources Alliance. Can you believe that two institutions brought ten staff members to the conference? Or that fourteen vendors worked *hard* to adapt to the online format and bring us new and exciting products?

It was truly a high-quality conference. On behalf of the Conference Committee, I offer our heartfelt praise and thanks for the amazing Atla staff who are the epitome of professionalism, adaptability, and creativity *and* are so, so kind and helpful too!

We also thank all session presenters, session hosts, exhibitors, and speakers. We will see you again next year in some way, shape, or “format!”