
COMMITTEE & TASK FORCE REPORTS

Conference

Jamie Lin, Atla Staff Liaison

Vance Thomas, Chair

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- Vance Thomas, Central Seminary, Chair
- Cindy Aalders, Regent College
- Jessica Boyer, Mount St. Mary's University
- Craig Kubic, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
- Derek Rieckens, Catholic Theological Union
- Oliver Schulz, Colorado Christian University
- Megan Welsh, University of Colorado Boulder
- Gillian Harrison Cain, Atla Director of Member Programs
- Denise McFarlin, Atla Staff Liaison
- Jamie Lin, Atla Staff Liaison

YEAR IN REVIEW

It has been an interesting and exciting year for the Conference Committee. As a full committee, we started our work back in September 2021. We welcomed Derek Rieckens as the new editor of the *Summary of Proceedings* and as a new committee member. Among the items we addressed were reviewing and revising the scoring rubric used to evaluate conference proposals as well as the challenges of effectively conducting a hybrid conference. Much of

the insights from the 2020 and 2021 virtual conferences were instructive, but the challenge of balancing in-person and virtual participation was not a simple task. Undaunted, we pushed forward and issued a call for proposals in October.

Committee members promoted the call for proposals throughout the remainder of the fall months and into December. After a short extension of the proposal submission deadline, the committee reconvened in February 2022 to review the proposals. We ultimately paired down our October projection of 95 sessions to a more modest and manageable number of 48. The reduction was necessitated by the logistics of managing a hybrid conference. After our deliberations concluded, we had a tentative list of sessions and a draft of a schedule.

As the time for the conference itself approached, committee members attended to last minute arrangements for the memorials and local host arrangements.

And with that, it was time to head to Baltimore.

ATLA ANNUAL 2022 CONFERENCE REVIEW

It's the dog days of summer, and classes will soon resume for many of us. Before we move on into this next season though, I would like to take a quick opportunity to reflect on the Atla Annual 2022.

Almost two months ago we gathered, many in person in Baltimore, even more virtually via Zoom, to commit time to the important tasks of learning from, sharing with, and providing support to one another in the work of theological librarianship. I know that sounds very formal and somewhat inflated in its expression, but these are the elements that make the annual conference so important and rewarding for me. Please humor me as I take a moment to lift each of these for reflection.

This year, attendees learned from three plenary speakers about contextual changes addressing theological libraries. Tony Zanders addressed the need to "future-proof" our libraries, to prepare our staff and institutions to be prepared and resilient for the changes ahead. He provided suggestions on how to strategically move into that future, how to empower workers, and develop responsive conferences. Dr. Michele A.L. Villagran reminded us that the biggest asset in all cultural contexts is people. She addressed how

emotional intelligence and cultural intelligence can help strengthen the bonds between those people and their context for greater success. Dr. Damayanthi M.A. Niles wrapped up the conference by challenging us to decenter our Christian perspective so that we can imagine the place of the sacred in other faith traditions. From a broader perspective, she invited us to risk decentering the convictions we privilege so that we see and hear the plurality of voices, many weaker and quieter than the dominant narrative. The goal is to create a space for plurality in librarianship. In all three of the plenaries, people were the central point of concern.

Contributing to the richness of ideas set by the plenary speakers, many of our colleagues shared their wisdom and insights with the rest of us by presenting papers, leading conversation groups, participating in panel discussions, and creating posters. Over 80 individuals communicated their experience and expertise across over 50 different sessions conducted between Tuesday evening and Saturday morning. In some instances, it was an opportunity to have a seasoned member of the association share an illuminating connection for those of us who still experience a little imposter syndrome. In other instances, it was an opportunity to have a new member share their enthusiasm and new insights that may have been missed by those of us who walk well-trod paths. I would be remiss if I neglected to mention our exhibitors who shared their many resources and tools to help us succeed. In all instances, our colleagues shared their time, their experience, and their reflections as they created a moment to dialogue on the successes and failures they have experienced. I, for one, am immensely grateful for such an offering.

Lastly, along with the learning and sharing, we had an opportunity to support one another. Whether by virtual means or in person, we gathered and gave one another a smile, a warm welcome, space to express cares and concerns, and maybe even a laugh or two. It started with the welcome for new members on Wednesday evening, an event that is routinely full of optimism and anxiety. As an association, we also took time during the memorials to remember our cherished colleagues who have died. We acknowledged the gift of service for those who volunteered on committees and boards. (I am especially thankful for fellow Conference Committee members.) We applauded the good work of Brenda Bailey-Hainer on her imminent retirement. And we offered thanks and praise (and continue to do so) to the Atla staff; without their countless hours of work the conference would not have happened.

With all that in mind, I think it is quite clear where the importance and value of the annual conference can be found. It is not in the opportunities to indulge the local food scene (yes, crab cakes were eaten); nor is it in the chance to explore local points of interest (I heard there was a baseball game nearby). Let's be honest—it's the people. It is the people, the members of this association, who are at the center of these learning, sharing, and supporting moments. These are the people who make the annual conference the event that it is. Whether it is a chance to have an animated conversation with a clutch of colleagues over a cup of coffee and snacks between sessions or a list of new professional contacts added to your address book or something similar, the value, and the real reward, of the conference are the people with whom we share this vocation.

In short, for me, the highlight of the conference was all of you. For that, I thank you.

I look forward to seeing you in 2023 in Ft. Worth, Texas. Until then, I'll be thinking of you.

ATLA ANNUAL 2022 CONFERENCE: BY THE NUMBERS

- 59 proposals submitted; 42 proposals accepted (71% acceptance rate)
- 258 total registrations
- 106 in-person participants
- 152 online participants
- 52 sessions
- 3 plenary sessions (3 hours of content)
- 42 sessions (40 hours of content)
- 7 vendor- or exhibitor-led sessions
- 27 interest and denominational group meetings

MANY THANKS

As a last order of business to wrap up Atla Annual 2022. I need to offer my thanks to the other members of the committee. First, two committee have completed their tenure: Cindy Aalders and Megan

Welsh. I will miss your presence on the committee greatly, whether that's in your patient indulgence of my icebreaker activities or your thoughtful questions and reflections. I hope we continue to meet the standard of excellence you have demonstrated. Special thanks to committee member and local host committee chair Jessica Boyer and her colleagues at Mount St. Mary's University for welcoming us to Baltimore. And to the other committee members—Craig Kubic, Derek Rieckens, and Oliver Schulz—I look forward to our time together again in 2023. Lastly, my deepest thanks to Gillian Harrison Cain, Jamie Lin, and Denise McFarlin for being the wizards behind the curtain that make a lot of the conference magic happen. We would be lost without you.