
Presbyterian and Reformed

Virginia Dearborn, Princeton Theological Seminary, Secretary

MEMBERS PRESENT

- Denise Pakala, retired, Covenant Theological Seminary
- Jim Pakala, retired, Covenant Theological Seminary
- Margaret Alkema, Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
- Robin McCall, Union Presbyterian Seminary
- Steve Jamieson, Covenant Theological Seminary
- Virginia Dearborn, Princeton Theological Seminary
- Becky Givens, Covenant Theological Seminary

AGENDA

Virginia, as interim moderator, welcomed everyone to the virtual meeting. She invited attendees to share introductions, library news, and other institutional updates. No one present had attended Atla Annual 2023 in person; only Virginia and Steve attended some of the conference virtually. Virginia would have attended more sessions but for an unexpected schedule conflict. Becky Givens, who was unable to join the denominational meeting, did attend the conference in person according to her colleagues.

In the reports below, looking for reference librarians and having difficulty offering adequate compensation to attract and retain library staff were clear themes. Adjacent to these were existing theological librarians having to fill multiple roles, having fewer librarians within particular religious traditions (or even familiar with them) in applicant pools, and institutional downsizing or other organizational decisions negatively impacting library staff retention.

Robin, a seminary graduate who completed her library degree in 2021 after being a professor for several years, remarked on the fact that theological librarianship was never mentioned in library school as an option in the field. As another example of seminary graduates entering the field, Virginia mentioned a Princeton Seminary grad who now is a librarian at Candler and Robin knew of an-

other as well. Robin mused about reaching out to her alma mater (and the rest of us doing the same) to advocate for greater visibility of theological librarianship in their programs. Jim remembered the theological librarianship course that used to be taught out of Drexel University, and now there's the course Carisse Berryhill teaches out of the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Atla members may take that course without paying out-of-state tuition, and perhaps more library schools need to be made aware of and promote it.

Virginia asked if anyone was interested in serving as the new moderator of the group. Robin volunteered and was approved by acclamation. Alexis from Atla mentioned that the member list for the group has not been updated for a very long time. Jim offered to help Robin review the list and make suggestions of others to invite to the group. Virginia also offered to help as needed.

ROUND ROBIN REPORTS

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada) – Margaret Alkema, Librarian, said that library-wise things have been pretty stable. She is still a solo librarian and the school is still very small. There was some construction going on in the building this past academic year, preventing classes from being held in the building. She was pleasantly surprised that quite a number of students still came in. Some of the building work meant that there was a wall with carrels along it that she could not use from February until May, but she made it work. She is also working on an ATS report and meanwhile needs more time to focus on looking at space requirements for the collection. The library purchases enough print that some areas are tight and shifting is needed, and probably weeding as well, but it takes time to plan.

Covenant Theological Seminary (Creve Coeur, Missouri, USA) – Steve Jamieson, Library Director, said the library has a very active year ahead. Staffing-wise, at the beginning of this past year, campus-wide cuts in personnel also affected the library and they lost a collection development librarian. Today is the last day for public services librarian, Andrew Stout, who is taking a position elsewhere. That position at least will be allowed to be refilled. Covenant is also up for ATS reaccreditation. Steve is on the steering committee for that process and chairing the subcommittee working on the library chapter. Buswell Library is also undergoing a library

system migration, because their consortium, MOBIUS, is moving from Millennium to FOLIO. They're implementing EBSCO Discovery Service as a frontend (or one frontend) for FOLIO. Thankfully, the cutover got pushed back to a more academic-friendly date, after the Spring 2024 semester is over. Also, the library will migrate to a new institutional repository later this year.

Although both Pakalas are retired, Denise volunteers in the library at Covenant, doing work with inventory in the rare book room and database cleanup with authority records and so forth. With the advent and growth of HathiTrust and the Internet Archive, she's now able to add links to freely available resources to the catalog records to a large collection of Bibles translated into many different languages that the library received many years ago.

Princeton Theological Seminary, Wright Library (Princeton, New Jersey, USA) – Virginia Dearborn, Discovery and Web Services Librarian, reported that since our last gathering the Seminary's first African American and first non-Presbyterian President, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Walton, began his term. President Walton is an M.Div. and Ph.D. graduate and former trustee of the Seminary. Outgoing Academic Dean Jacqueline Lapsley is leaving to become the President of Union Presbyterian Seminary. Also, the Seminary has launched two new degree programs, Master of Arts in Theology (Justice and Public Life), which is a two-year part-time, hybrid program, and Master of Arts in Theology & Ecology (MTE), a 13-month residential program.

As of this meeting, Wright Library has open searches for two full-time positions: Reference and Research Librarian and Head of Circulation Services. Foot traffic in the library has yet to resume pre-pandemic levels, as shuttle service from the student family housing is limited, fewer single students are living on campus, and the Seminary drew down its enrollment in recent years. The library has also implemented Sierra via Summon, added LCSH terms (where present) as "Topics" in the Theological Commons open-access digital library, and is being included in a website migration and redesign project along with the rest of the seminary. One library staff member participated in one of the new Life Together courses last year and another will participate this fall. These courses are open to first-year students and taught by a faculty member assisted by an administrator; in addition to course work, each class attends worship together in the chapel followed by eating lunch together weekly and does a service project together.

Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, Virginia, USA) – Robin McCall, the new seminary librarian at Union Presbyterian Seminary, reported that following the departure of Christopher Richardson (who was the most recent convener of our denominational group) at the end of January, she became the new seminary librarian. Previously, she had been working for about two years as the reference librarian. Things have been pretty good so far and a little bit of an adventure. They are trying to find a reference librarian to replace her and someone to replace the director of the Charlotte campus library. She does finally have somebody in an interim position in Charlotte, but the reference librarian search continues.

OTHER

Noting the low attendance at the meeting, Robin asked how we might get more Atla members to join our denominational group. One challenge is that many people working at Presbyterian or Reformed schools are not themselves members of those denominational groups. Jim suggested those of us at PCUSA seminaries could encourage the new(er) library directors and so on at Columbia, Austin, Louisville, and Pittsburgh, to get involved. Denise suggested hosting a short lecture on a topic of interest to Presbyterian and Reformed librarians during our meeting or possibly at another time that might work as a draw. Robin mentioned the Grawemeyer Award in Religion out of Louisville Seminary together with the University of Louisville, <https://www.lpts.edu/friends/grawemeyer/>, as a possible source. Not only are all the books that get nominated about religion, but many of them are also specifically related to Presbyterianism. Dr. Tyler Mayfield chairs the program; Rev. Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas is the 2023 award winner. We do not know if and/or how the library is involved in the program, but that could be something to follow up on.

As we were a small group this year, after the introductions, there was some reminiscing about various library building challenges and about the days when John Trotti, who was the seminary librarian at Union for many years, led the Presbyterian and Reformed Denominational Group meetings. Trotti passed away in 2013.