



**A Statement from the Council of the Society of Biblical Literature**  
*November 2011*

At the SBL Annual Business Meeting a year ago, Council reported to you on its response to a vigorous discussion on the nature and identity of our Society that began in the summer of 2010. We welcomed that discussion and the opportunities it afforded to clarify SBL's mission, membership, and policies. We reported on a number of initial actions taken by Council to address issues raised. However, we realized that some matters were more complex and far reaching. Although discussion had begun on these, we pledged to continue that discussion and invited further communication from any of our members. We have included time on the agenda of each meeting of Council during 2011 for further deliberation on the issues identified in our report to you last year. Many of our SBL standing committees have also worked to clarify matters of policy and procedure related to the issues raised. We believe the result has been a very fruitful year of work bringing needed clarity to a number of areas affecting our identity as a learned society and the policies that guide our work together.

In this report we highlight significant actions taken by your SBL Council supported by the work of many of our standing committees and the work of SBL's extraordinary staff.

1. Council engaged in a lengthy discussion of the **SBL Mission Statement, Strategic Vision Statement, and Core Values**. This discussion was informed by the wider conversation of last year among SBL members and by direct communications to Council from some members. We took the following actions:

- We are not recommending any change to the three-word Mission Statement of the SBL, "Foster Biblical Scholarship." This brief statement is a part of our Constitution and requires a considerable process to make any changes. More to the point, we believe we are well served by such a succinct and clear Mission Statement. Most of the suggested changes represent efforts to clarify various ways in which that Mission can or should be understood. We believe such clarifications are more appropriate in the Society's Strategic Vision Statement and Core Values.
- Council did make some significant changes to the SBL Strategic Vision Statement and Core Values. These revisions are made available at this Business Meeting and will be posted on the website. Noteworthy is the opening paragraph of the Vision Statement that SBL is "devoted to the critical investigation of the Bible from a variety of academic perspectives." The first bullet notes our commitment to "academic study" and the fourth bullet affirms a "variety of critical perspectives." A revised listing of Core Values now includes "Critical Inquiry"

as a core value. Alongside this clear commitment to academic and critical inquiry and scholarship is an equally strong commitment of the Society to be broadly inclusive of diverse perspectives and contexts within which biblical scholarship is pursued. Both Vision Statement and Core Values reaffirm an atmosphere in all SBL forums of respect for diversity, professional conduct, and collaborative ways of working together. We believe that these revised statements of mission, vision, and core values set the standard under which the work of the Society can go forward in the manner appropriate to the work of a learned society.

2. We reported a year ago that the Program Committee had already begun a major comprehensive review of the policies and procedures that guide the program units of our Annual and International Meetings. That work is nearly complete, and the results will be seen in a new Handbook for the Annual Meeting Program Committee and a Handbook for Program Unit Chairs. Processes and criteria for proposing and approving program units (initial and renewal) are clarified and reorganized. There is now a clearer process by which the work of the Program Committee is brought to Council for oversight. Other issues addressed include the makeup of steering committees, responsibilities of presiders to oversee appropriate discussion and guidelines for appropriate papers and presenters. These Handbooks will be made available on the SBL website.

3. There has been some concern over participating multiple times on the program. Council's action of a year ago is reaffirmed and stands:

- *Full members of SBL are limited to participate in no more than two regular sessions as a presenter, panelist, or respondent. Appearances on Affiliate programs do not count towards this total. SBL committee and business sessions do not count towards this total.*

The guidelines for student participation in the Annual Meeting are slightly modified from those announced last year:

- *All first-time presenters (full and student members of SBL) must submit the paper to-be-read to the program unit chair(s) during the call for papers period.*
- *Student members of SBL may participate in two sessions as presider, panelist, or respondent but are limited to only one paper presentation.*

4. SBL Council has adopted a new policy statement related to Affiliate Organizations. This document, available on the SBL website, details a process of initial application and periodic review and renewal for such Affiliate Organizations with Council now involved in approving such relationships. Of particular interest to members may be the criteria adopted for eligibility to become an Affiliate Organization:

*To be eligible, an organization should have the following characteristics:*

- *Act in a manner consistent with SBL's Strategic Vision Statement and Core Values.*
- *Be independent, not-for-profit, formally organized, and at least three years old.*
- *Have a national or international constituency.*
- *Have a majority of members who are professional scholars or teachers.*

- *Profess a mission consistent with the Society’s mission to “foster biblical scholarship.”*
- *Support scholarly analysis and open discussion.*

5. While we believe that Council has been faithful to address the range of issues that were immediately placed before us, we understand that concern for the identity, practices and policies of the Society of Biblical Literature with its great diversity of members and programs must be an ongoing matter. To that end, Council has agreed to regularly devote time at each of its meetings to strategic planning and review. In particular, our strategic vision statement and core values will be subject to ongoing review. As always, we welcome communications from any of our members drawing our attention to matters of concern.

The members of the SBL Council would like to express thanks to all members who have participated in this important discussion. We have made every effort to take your concerns seriously and address them comprehensively. We hope we have your confidence that we will continue to do so.

Respectfully submitted,

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