

27 May 2022

Dear Colleague,

As SBL approaches its sesquicentennial in 2030, opportunities for change present themselves. In part, these changes are the result of the pandemic and, in part, determined by the path SBL must undertake in order to serve as equitably as possible all of its members.

The pandemic laid bare disparities of access and opened new opportunities in higher education. It highlighted concerns about accessibility and the physical challenges related to health risks, in addition to other obstacles that our members face, such as increased financial burdens, uneven distribution of resources, and international inequities. We also keenly observed that the 2020 virtual meeting had the highest participation in any annual meeting by scholars in SBL's International Cooperation Initiative program, as well as by students, contingent faculty, and early career scholars. It reminded us, too, of the disproportionate privilege of many members in North America. One of SBL's seven vision statements asserts that "the Society offers its members opportunities for mutual support, intellectual growth, and professional development [by] ... promoting cooperation across global boundaries." For the majority of members outside the US, our current meetings have always been inaccessible.

In [January](#), we noted how seriously SBL takes its role in convening, which provides opportunities for scholarly exchange and professional development and creates community and connection through the networks formed. That opportunity should be available to all members. We learned much from the last two years hosting virtual or dual-format meetings. We have striven for ways these may become an ongoing part of our long-term future, which includes serving those for whom the in-person Annual or International Meeting is not accessible for a variety of reasons, such as health, disability, geographical location, and financial resources.

Balancing the needs of all SBL members is the responsibility of Council and staff. That balance includes capacity and resource allocation. Limited resources will not allow us to do everything we would like to do. In every decision, the goal is to do more with the finite resources we have—that your support through membership and gifts make possible—in order to distribute those resources and opportunities more equitably and to foster biblical scholarship more widely.

With this responsibility and with the experiences of the last two years, the SBL Council is announcing steps that extend the Society's mission to provide all its members with more opportunities:

Beginning in 2023, SBL will launch a global, virtual meeting in the March/April timeframe. The virtual meeting will incorporate inclusive design principles. As a meeting designed from the ground up for a virtual environment, it can offer experiences, opportunities, mentoring possibilities, presentation formats, and accessibility that are not possible in an in-person meeting. This new meeting will make every attempt to avoid obstacles to participation, with an emphasis on having live session times available for all parts of the world as well as opportunities for asynchronous participation, rather than sessions being restricted to the time zones of North America. The meeting will also leverage technology to provide more accessibility for more members. Sessions and presentations that make intentional use of a virtual environment will be prioritized, as will sessions that seek to meet the needs of members who are better served by a digital platform.

SBL SOCIETY OF BIBLICAL LITERATURE

2022 will mark the end of the eleven yearly SBL Regional Meetings. While the formal regional structure of SBL will end, local meetings will still be an important part of biblical studies. SBL will continue to connect members, not just those in North America but members around the world, to locally organized events in their area.

A Global Virtual Meeting will not replace the in-person Annual or International Meetings, which also have unique experiences that cannot be duplicated in a virtual environment. It will be another opportunity for those who cannot attend the AM and IM to still enjoy the convening and the community fundamental to a learned society's raison d'être. Together with our in-person meetings, we want to build what is uniquely the best for each environment, in order for members to contribute to their field and professional lives.

In planning this new meeting opportunity, Council and staff will consult widely with commercial technology services as well with SBL governance groups and member expertise. We hope for your patience and support. We will not get it perfect or near perfect, neither the first time nor the next. We will, however, make every effort to improve each and every time.

Preliminary plans for the Global Virtual Meeting, including a timeline and information about the types of proposals and presentations envisioned, are now available on the [SBL website](#). Please check in with that page and continue to monitor SBL communications for developments as those plans progress.

We understand the feeling of loss that some will experience by ending the North American Regional Meetings. Regional Meetings have had a long history, and members who have organized these meetings have done extraordinary service, for which SBL is profoundly grateful. We hope that members will see in this transition the singular contribution Regional Meetings have made; they began in order for more members to participate in meetings when travel to the Annual Meeting was prohibitive. They formed the model for SBL now to fulfill more fully its mission to provide professional development opportunities for all of its members, opportunities that technology makes possible.

Sincerely,

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