

6 March 2020

Dear Colleagues,

I know you are too busy for long emails, but I encourage you to read this update regarding SBL's 2020 meetings and the impact of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

Regional, Annual, and International Meetings are core to SBL's mission to offer its members opportunities for mutual support, intellectual growth, and professional development. We also know that many members, their institutions, affiliated organizations, and exhibitors are concerned about the coronavirus that has spread across the globe.

While SBL's mission is to facilitate professional opportunities for its members, it does so with the health and safety of its members prioritized first. We also know you need practical information in order to arrange travel with as little personal or financial risk as possible. We do not want to make decisions (such as cancellations) that leave members without options; we would do so only as a last resort when unexpected developments occur. We will make every effort for this not to happen.

SBL staff participates in networks of associations, including the American Council of Learned Societies and the American Society of Association Executives. Both organizations are sharing information and resources that are vetted, curated, and up to date. Because this outbreak has been described as unprecedented, we should expect developments to continue to evolve day by day. We will monitor this closely and provide members with information we have also vetted through these networks and others.

The present concern is beyond everyone's control, and governments and institutions are taking actions they determine to be responsible, while trying to avoid sowing fear or misinformation. Many of these decisions, such as travel restrictions by institutions or governments, may impact members. Likewise, SBL staff and Council, in consultation with its networks and partners and informed by authorities at the Centers for Disease Control and the World Health Organization, will strive for the safety of its members as they make professional decisions regarding SBL conferences.

Three types of conferences are the immediate focus of concern and planning:

- **North American Regional Meetings (March and May).** Three meetings have already taken place, and another two are scheduled for the next two weeks. Out of an abundance of caution, Princeton Theological Seminary canceled all events for which people are traveling from outside the area, including the Mid-Atlantic Regional Meeting. SBL and AAR are deeply grateful to Princeton for its flexibility in requiring no charges for the meeting space, the catering, or the on-campus lodging. **As of today, only the Pacific Coast and New England Regions are hosting a meeting in a state with confirmed coronavirus cases; at present, neither [California](#) nor [Massachusetts](#) is recommending the cancelation of public events, and both are emphasizing that the risk to the general public is low.**
- **International Meeting in Adelaide, Australia (July).** We are monitoring this situation closely and carefully and following the best guidelines in consultation with our colleagues in Australia, the Australian government, our association networks, and the Centers for Disease Control. The Australian Government's Department of Health has visitor health and travel alerts [here](#), and at this time the [University of Adelaide](#) continues to welcome students and scholars from around the globe.

This year we will open IM registration April 1, and we suggest that you postpone booking airfare that does not have flexible change policies until registration opens. If the situation changes, we will alert you as soon as we know. You can find SBL International Meeting travel updates [here](#).

- Annual Meeting in Boston, Massachusetts (November). Registration does not typically open until mid-April. We hope to gain greater clarity on the situation between now and then. **At present, the best information and guidelines we can provide are from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which has offered guidance regarding the coronavirus and mass gatherings: to date, the CDC does not recommend postponing or canceling large events (<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/mass-gatherings-ready-for-covid-19.html>).** If this guidance changes, we will post new information that has been vetted for accuracy, as members and exhibitors plan their travel and participation. Nevertheless, we suggest that you postpone booking airfare that does not have flexible change policies until registration opens. A web page with SBL Annual Meeting travel updates will be available soon.

For all these meetings, we will strive to provide information so you can register and make travel plans as risk-free as possible. You can expect updates on our meeting pages, through emails, and via Twitter.

The [CDC](#) and the [World Health Organization](#) have provided guides for prevention and treatment. Follow travel guidelines (institutional and state). Consider flight insurance or use airlines that have flexible policies, but take care to read policies for details on coverage and exclusions.

Especially, we hope for the containment of this virus and the health of everyone across the globe. In the meantime, please stay safe.

Sincerely,



John F. Kutsko  
Executive Director