

AAR keeps plan for stand-alone meeting: Traditionally meets concurrently with Society of Biblical Literature

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Despite an on-line petition signed by nearly 3,000 members, the board of directors for the 10,000-member American Academy of Religion said the organization of religion scholars will not rescind its decision last year to meet separately from the Society of Biblical Literature, beginning in 2008.

A letter sent to AAR members said the board spent most of its spring meeting discussing issues related to the petition initiated by Karen King of Harvard Divinity School and Elaine Pagels of Princeton University. King, contacted by the Century on April 26, said the two were declining to comment on the decision.

The board, according to its letter dated April 20, appointed a task force to advise board members on implementing the plan to give more program opportunities at their stand-alone meetings to satisfy scholars in fields that are “already experiencing pent-up demand, are currently underrepresented” or are “new and emerging.” The AAR board said the concurrent annual meetings with the SBL, which continue through 2007, had limited its wide-ranging topical growth.

Chaired by former AAR President Judith Berling of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, the task force will include a range of academic specialists, “including several with specific interests in biblical studies and Christian theology.”

In addition, the board directed AAR Executive Secretary Barbara DeConcini to explore the possibility of holding “periodic” concurrent meetings with the Society of Biblical Literature as well as with other groups such as the American Anthropological Association, the Middle East Studies Association and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion.