

News of the Society

Greetings from the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies! The fall newsletter contains important information about the society and its activities. (Check out our [website](#), [blog](#), or [Facebook](#) page).

This issue includes:

- Report about the Annual Meeting of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies
- Members Kunihiro Terasawa and Leo Lefebure Visit to Taiwan
- Membership, contribution, and other contact info



**Honoring, Listening, And Fostering
Peace through Friendship:
SBCS Annual Meeting
Nov. 17 – 18 2023, San Antonio**

Sandra Costen Kunz
SBCS Secretary

The SBCS held its annual meeting the weekend before Thanksgiving in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), as one of its “related scholarly organizations.” Three important decisions that the board of directors made are:

- 1) the approval of a new publication agreement with University of Hawai‘i Press (UHP) that journal co-editors Thomas Cattoi and Kristin Largen and treasurer John Sheveland spent many hours working out with UHP’s staff,
- 2) the creation of new standing committee: Oral History and Archives. It will record long-time members’ memories of their involvement with society and collect photos and documents pertinent to the society’s history,
- 3) the decision to hold an online board meeting before AAR’s annual meeting to complete as much routine annual business as possible so that our once-a-

year, face-to-face time together can be devoted to more in-depth planning and problem-solving and spending more time listening to, and learning from, each other.

Three other highlights of this year’s meeting were: 1) honoring long-time interreligious peacemaker Thich Nhat Hahn at our Saturday morning session, 2) listening to Won Buddhists describe their interreligious peace-making practices at our Saturday afternoon session, and, 3) committing ourselves as a board to be more faithful in following the practices of the founders of the society by setting aside more time to foster interreligious peace not only through careful scholarship but also through caring friendships.

In its early decades the society spent much of its time and income hosting multi-day international conferences that provided much more time for developing friendships and for learning from each other than our board meetings and paper sessions at AAR have provided. We have sometimes planned field trips to local temples or churches, or dinners at restaurants, but these “extra programs” were always an ad hoc add-on. This year the board committed itself to reviving the friendship-building and learning-from-each-other priorities of our predecessors in the society and to discerning how to embody them in SBCS programming..

Since I see this year's meeting as something of a watershed moment for the society, I've devoted more pages to this annual meeting article than usual to share more fully with our members and other readers of *Buddhist Christian Studies* the work that we did and the possibilities that we discussed.

Friday Board of Directors Meeting

President's Opening Remarks

President Mark Unno called the meeting to order with these words: "The main thing I want to say is: 'Thank you to all our board members for an amazing year!' " Noting how many AAR-related societies struggled through the digital transition and then the pandemic, he expressed gratitude that the SBCS sustained robust activity through the heavy lifting by many board members.

After welcoming at-large members Gloria Chien from Gonzago University and Trent Pomplum from Notre Dame to their first in-person board meeting, Mark relayed at-large board member Victor Gabriel's regrets for being unable to attend. After each person had updated everyone with whatever seemed most pertinent, we moved to the international advisors', officers', and committees' reports.

International Advisor Reports

Elizabeth Harris from the European Network of Buddhist Christian Studies began by announcing that the papers from their 2022 conference "Euro-Buddhism and the Role of Christianity" will be published in 2024 by EOS Verlag. Our journal co-editor Thomas Cattoi contributed. Their next conference titled "A Buddhist-Christian Dialogue on the Body" will be at St. Ottilien Benedictine Abbey in Bavaria June 27 – July 1, 2024. She reminded us that they issue an open call for papers that supplement their invited keynote addresses, in part to help scholars get travel funding. The network's conference in 2026 will be held at the Protestant Academy for Mission Studies (EMW) at the University of Hamburg to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the network's founding there by Rev. Gerhard Köberlin.

She noted that, in the UK, the number of courses in religious studies and specifically Buddhist studies are being reduced. Sadly, scholarship in UK Buddhist studies about Buddhist interactions with religious others tends to be limited to the earliest centuries. Despite this, she's now supervising two doctoral students treating *current* Buddhist-Christian interactions in Sri Lanka. One is writing about the Buddhist influences on the incorporation of silence into the Sri Lankan Anglican liturgy. The other's topic is Christian identity in a majority Buddhist culture where churches are experiencing increasing difficulties because the nationalist Buddhist political right, which is close communication with the nationalist Buddhist left in Myanmar, is laying new burdens upon them. One example is increasing the bureaucratic obstacles involved in building new churches.

Liz was quite clear that she thinks scholarship in Buddhist-Christian studies needs to give more attention to *current* Buddhist-Christian interactions. As president of the UK Association for Buddhist Studies, she moderates a small discussion forum four times a year with about a dozen in attendance. The next topic will be "Peacemaking in Buddhism and Christianity."

Kuni Terasawa reported that the Japan Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies held two recent conferences. In March 2023 the topic was religion and war. His brother, Jinsei Terasawa, a Nichiran Buddhist monk, contributed. He's been involved in peacemaking efforts with churches in the Ukraine since the 2014 protests of Russia's attempt to divide the Ukraine by occupying the Crimea. The second conference was on how to live in an age of crisis, focusing especially on Nishida and Barth.

Next Kuni recapped last year's conference in Seoul on religious diversity in Christian higher education in which he, Leo Lefebure, Caroline Medine, and Mark Unno participated and which Grace Song helped host. It was covered in an article in the fall 2023 newsletter. During his most recent trip to Japan with Wartburg College students, Kuni participated in Buddhist-Christian dialogue at Otani University in Kyoto.

As part of his and his brothers' efforts to encourage transnational Buddhist-Christian dialogue among youth, the Wartburg students also met with students at a Risshō-Kōsei-kai high school.

Vice-President's Program Committee Report

Carolyn Medine, as vice-president and thus the program committee's chair, began by thanking Grace Song for helping organize the upcoming Saturday evening panel titled "Won Buddhism and Inter-religious Thought." It featured Dharma teachers, priests, UN representatives, and social activists from this Korean-founded lineage. Carolyn told us that Saturday morning's panel "Thich Nhat Hanh's Influence on Inter-religious Thought and Practices" would begin with J.K. Kato, who would locate him theoretically within current inter-religious thought, then feature two authors of recent books about Nhat Hahn, and end with Mobi Warren, a poet and puppeteer. In the sixties, she dropped out of the University of Texas to live with Nhat Hanh and Sr. Chan Khong as they served as the Buddhist delegation to the Paris negotiations to end the war in Vietnam. She translated his earliest works published in English, e.g. *Fragrant Palm Leaves*, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, and many poems. Carolyn explained that the panel she had planned on the Four Noble Truths and Alice Walker's four-part definition of Womanist thought had to be postponed until a future year because of unexpected challenges in the lives of the invited presenters.

Carolyn voiced her hope that the following topics that the program committee considered for the 2023 meeting will continue to be considered for 2024 or later: 1) Buddhist-Christian eco-justice, 2) children, trauma, and Buddhist-Christian thought (which Kuni has been researching), 3) something around working class religious practice (which would incorporate Duane Bidwell's suggestion of considering Soka Gakai), and 4) "nightstand" or "book practice," i.e. learning about a Buddhist or Christian tradition from books, especially in contexts where a local community of practice is lacking.

She also suggested we offer a program on the timely topic of "Peacemaking and Conflict Resolution" in an online format since this would potentially offer a more diverse presenter pool and audience. Liz Harris reminded us of pertinent UK and Asian resources for the topic. As I watched the heads of long-time SBCS members nod approval for this topic, I remembered particular ways in which some of them – and some board members in the past – had practiced and sometimes written about ways of resolving conflicts that were inspired by Buddhist and Christian texts, practices, and communities. Nurturing peace has been a perennial SBCS priority.

In the open discussion of program topics that followed, Duane suggested a program on the challenges of leading a local Christian church or Buddhist sangha while practicing within, or in some way belonging to, both a Christian and a Buddhist tradition. Stephanie Wong suggested a program on Buddhist and Christian experiences of, and responses to, the falling birth rates which, in some nations, are driven by economic worries.

JK Kato (the incoming vice-president and thus the program committee chair who'll make the final program decisions for the 2024 annual meeting) suggested a panel honoring Ruben Habito's contributions to Buddhist Christian studies. This idea immediately evoked unanimous enthusiasm! Duane suggested that the session be structured so that instead of just "responding" to what the prior presenters had said, Ruben would have plenty of time to offer his own well-seasoned words of advice to the society.

Both Mark and journal co-editor Kristin Largen proposed the topic of radical interfaith friendship, suggesting we link it to Carolyn and Liz's recommendations of conflict resolution. Grace Song suggested that such a linked conversation might proceed most fruitfully within a rural retreat setting like the Won Buddhist Center in upstate New York. Echoing our 2023 board meeting's conversation about making time for nurturing friendship, Mark commented: "In many ways our work is

relational work. Hopefully it has a significant impact in the world, but unless we ourselves actually *model* the vision we want to put out there through the journal and our sessions, they aren't going to have long-lasting value." Noting that organizing both a retreat and a session on this topic would be a *lot* of work, he said that he can't think of a reason why we couldn't do both, and that if a retreat were timed carefully, it could strengthen the material that would be presented later at the panel.

Online Platform, Software, Web Apps, and Data Tracking

Much of the rest of our 2023 meeting involved discussions related in one way or another to the society's online platform and its software, web apps, and data tracking. This included the discussions following the treasurer's, journal co-editors', executive associate for digital services', and the Social Media and Website Committee reports. For the sake of readers unfamiliar with the board's work, I'm providing in the following paragraphs some historical context for these 2023 discussions.

During the past decade, the higher education and religious communities from which many of the society's members are drawn have come to rely much more heavily on online communications, especially since the pandemic. This has, in many instances, complicated how the SBCS accumulates and distributes both funds and data back and forth to the IRS, the University of Hawai'i Press (UHP), the AAR, other academic and religious organizations, and our members. As Mark commented in his 2023 opening remarks, this transition involved a lot of heavy lifting – and pandemic pivoting – by the board, especially its officers and committee chairs, some of whom were working in both the US and Asia or West Africa.

For the past twenty years, the society's perennial tasks have been: a) compiling and distributing a newsletter to members twice yearly, b) organizing sessions where scholars present their research yearly, and c) publishing a journal yearly. The following historical snapshots from the society's 2013 annual

meeting minutes illustrate how these tasks have changed in the last decade.

In 2013 Jonathan Seitz, based in Taiwan, still had to make sure that the newsletter was snail mailed to 20 members scattered globally who could not reliably receive it via email. This was a significant proportion of our membership at that time, which according to then-treasurer Guy McCloskey, had lost 10 people that year. In 2013, many SBCS members were receiving travel allowances which covered much of their costs to attend AAR yearly. Our journal's publisher, University of Hawai'i Press, had in 2000 begun to publish a digital version. The collision of: 1) digitally-driven budget changes in academic publishing, 2) cuts to faculty positions and research support, and 3) additions to faculty course loads triggered many SBCS board discussions during the past decade about how to keep article submissions flowing into our editors and how to keep the society, its journal, its finances, and the workloads of our editors and other officers viable.

In 2013, the society's online presence was minimal. Treasurer Guy McCloskey sent our only website-related payments to Morse Media, who'd used free, open-source software to build and manage it. They billed us only when a board member asked them to make changes. We asked only rarely! We also made changes to our Facebook page only rarely. It was free and was managed informally by board members.

Western academe's increasing expectation that scholarly organizations maintain a "robust online presence," plus our desire to increase our membership long-term by attracting graduate students, inspired the 2013 board to form an ad hoc committee to "improve the public face of the society." This committee was intentionally composed primarily of graduate students and junior faculty. They were given \$3,500 to improve our website and add content to it regularly: content we hoped would appeal to up-and-coming scholars in Buddhist-Christian studies. The board also appointed a committee member to serve as Facebook administrator, paying him \$50 a month.

At the following 2014 board meeting, everyone concurred that this committee was crucial for the society's future. It was upgraded to a standing committee and named the "Social Media and Website Committee" and was tasked with creating a new website. Long-time SBCS member Judith Simmer-Brown was elected its chair.

To the board's delight, by the next meeting a beautiful new website was up and running. It became equipped to: a) process and track new memberships, renewals of membership, and membership data and dues and, b) host a brief history of the society, old newsletters, members-only links to back issues of the journal, and eventually a blog designed, at least initially, to attract and feature graduate student writing. Since the pandemic, especially, the blog has attracted an increasingly diverse readership.

At each subsequent annual board meeting, Judith carefully presented the website's analytics. Board members watched with great interest as the following six things increased significantly: a) the number of SBCS members, b) the proportion of younger members, c) the society's international reach, d) the number of views on our website and Facebook page, e) the average amount of time that viewers spend on our website, and f) the number of different web apps managed by different companies to handle different tasks. These web apps require different payments to different payees on different schedules.

Treasurer's report

Treasurer John Sheveland reported that the society's income is currently drawn almost entirely from membership payments with a much smaller amount from unsolicited and gratefully accepted donations. He brought us the good financial news that our renewed agreement with University of Hawai'i Press (covered in the co-editors' report, below) could potentially provide the SBCS with some funds for our meetings at AAR if we were to publicize their titles there. The bad news is that, while these funds could help a lot, they would not eliminate the trend of the society's drawing

down our bank balance. He offered three suggestions:

- 1) raise our membership dues for the nonstudent categories while keeping the student rate low. Duane suggested that for scholars who are not paid in US dollars that we use the UN's guidelines aimed at equity.
- 2) recruit new members. Kristin suggested we publicize more clearly the perks of membership and consider increasing them, and that the board make increasing our membership a consideration in all our decisions.
- 3) support our journal and publisher by encouraging our own institutions to subscribe.

Our greatest expense, John reported, is paying our executive associate for managing the website, followed closely by our payments to AAR for annual meeting expenses. These are followed by smaller payments to our various web apps/online service vendors.

John noted a discrepancy between the number of dues-paying members shown in the financial data to which he's had access and the number of members shown on the mailing list sent to UHP. Thomas noted that he and Kristin don't have access to the web app from which the mailing list is drawn.

John described several finance-related aspects of SBCS membership involve our web apps: 1) paying to join the society for the first time, 2) paying annual dues, which automatically renew unless cancelled, 3) cancelling membership, 4) being included on the email list for newsletters, 5) being included on the list to receive that year's print copy of the journal. The treasurer's responsibilities, and also those of the newsletter editor, the journal co-editors, the Social Media and Website Committee, the Membership Committee, and the executive associate all rely on various membership-related web apps.

Due to the organic way in which the 2014 website expanded as more and more of the society's functions moved online, when Chera Jo Watts was hired as the very part-time paid executive associate for digital services, no one on the board had access to all the web apps. A few officers or committee chairs had access to one or two apps. The board has marveled at Chera Jo's patient good humor with coaxing various apps to communicate with each other coherently and with finding work-arounds when frustrated members (including board officers!) couldn't figure out a way to coax the membership payment software to function in a way that seemed coherent.

Another piece of good news John reported is that UHP is willing to give the society their extra AAR registration. Kristin suggested we reserve it for the new treasurer as an incentive for taking on a task that historically has been hard to fill, since Mark had reported that he'd been turned down by several people he'd approached about being nominated for treasurer. Mark volunteered to take on managing the society's accounts until we could elect a treasurer, but remarked that as the complexity of the society has increased, the treasurer's position has in some ways expanded into a CFO position.

John recommended that the board rethink how various web-related and finance-related tasks are coordinated among various board members and the executive associate with an eye to making everyone's work easier. He expressed a hope that the new treasurer can have "a seamless relationship to everything involving membership and revenue."

Discussion about the Website

The treasurer's report led us into discussing the website. At-large member Elizabeth Tyler reported that she'd just spent twenty minutes on our website trying unsuccessfully to disable cookies. Mark reported that he, as a Mac user, and many other members, currently use online safety features that weren't in use when our website was created. He's discovered that these new features can make navigating our website, including our payment page, difficult.

Our wide-ranging discussion, which continued after lunch, mentioned four possible ways to, once again, "improve the public face of the society" and concurrently reduce the number of hours that our paid executive associate and our volunteer officers and committee chairs spend wrangling with web apps and website issues:

1. *New website option:* Pay a web designer to create a new website in which:
 - a. all the financial and other web apps would work together with standard banking-small business software so that the treasurer could easily: i) make payments, ii) deposit, withdraw and track funds, iii) access needed data and generate reports.
 - b. all the membership-related apps would work together seamlessly so the journal co-editors, newsletter editor, Social Media and Website Committee chair, and treasurer could quickly access needed data and generate accurate current mailing lists.
 - c. either the executive associate, or the Social Media and Website Committee, or both, could quickly upload blog posts, photos, newsletters or other docs onto the website
2. *New combined website-and-video-conference-platform option:* Pay a vendor for a system that would support a-c above plus allow the society to host its own online conferences and provide in-app file and document exchange among program planners, presenters, and participants. Duane reported that the Taos Institute's Relational Research Network has been having a good experience with such a package, at least after the initial learning curve.
3. *Stick with our current website option:* Pay our executive associate for the increased hours it would require for her to:

- a. Do whatever is required so that each board member who needs data from an app linked to our website has access to the app itself and learns how to use it, unless they'd prefer to simply be sent a report.
 - b. Continue to help our members solve their website-related problems, especially those involving membership payments. If problems arise again, revise the instructions on the payment page or switch to less confusing payment options.
4. *Outsource part of our financial management option:* Pay someone to manage some of the finance-related SBCS matters using their own platform and software. The executive associate and board members would continue to use the current web apps on the current website to do their non-finance-related work unless we find the resources to pay for a new website.

At one point Mark summarized our situation: "We need to either fix the problems of the current website or think about either finding a new platform or a new vendor . . . It could be a substantial expense to redo the website, but it would be a one-time expense to get a better working website all around, including paying membership fees. . . . We could hire a web designer who could transfer the content already on our website into a templated website that has the payment system built in." He raised the possibility of our soliciting and receiving donations designated specifically for a new website.

Secretary's Nomination Committee Report

Sandy Kunz reported before and during the meeting that the board needed to fill two regular at-large vacancies on the roster of board and committee positions that the secretary manages, and also the book review editor position, due to Jason VonWachenfeldt's resignation.

Prior to the meeting the nominating committee had proposed Joseph Cheah for one of the at-large positions, having already learned from him that, while he'd be happy to join the board, he could serve only two years. At the meeting Mark proposed Stephanie Wong for the other at-large position, and Thomas proposed Christina Atienza for book review editor. The board unanimously approved the following slate to be presented to the Saturday members meeting for them to ratify, or not ratify. Each person's term would be completed at the end of the annual meeting of the year in parentheses.

- Joseph Cheah (University of St. Joseph) at-large board member (2025)
- Stephanie Wong (Villanova) at-large board member (2027)
- Christina Atienza (Santa Clara University) book review editor (2027)

The board heartily approved Thomas' generous offer to serve another 4-year term as journal co-editor and Elizabeth's to serve another 4-year term as the international advisor representing the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies.

Mark and Sandy reminded everyone that she's retiring from the secretary's position after the San Diego meeting in November 2024, but plans to write the minutes and the newsletter and journal reports for that meeting.

Post 2023 annual meeting vacancy updates:

The Streng Book Award Committee chair needs to be filled by a member with some familiarity with what's been published in Buddhist-Christian studies. Since publishers are usually delighted to send free review copies to the chair of this committee, this position is a great way to

keep abreast of the newest publications in the field.

The treasurer's position is vacant. While the board is deciding how best to improve our website, Mark is serving as interim treasurer while also serving as past president. It might be wise to fill this four-year term soon with a member who's participated in SBCS programs and is comfortable with basic banking and web payment apps. This way the new treasurer who'll rely on the website for at least four years would have input into the website improvement decisions. The treasurers' financial tasks average less than two hours per month.

If you might be interested in serving in either position please contact our president, Carolyn Medine, at medine@uga.edu

Past President's Report

To inform us about international contacts interested in Buddhist-Christian exchanges with SBCS members, Leo Lefebure shared with us about the people and groups he met in his travels this year. For decades he's been an SBCS goodwill ambassador. As he put it, "I talk about our society and encourage people to join."

In May 2023 he flew to Thailand, having been invited by Ari Dy, SJ, to give a presentation in Chiang Mai to a meeting of the Buddhist Studies and Dialogue Group of the Jesuit Conference of Asia Pacific. While he spent a week at the Jesuits' Xavier Church in Bangkok, Rev. Sunmi Choi introduced him, over a Korean dinner, to two Won Buddhist leaders then in Bangkok: Honorary Professor Lee Seong Jun of Wonkwang University in Iksan, South Korea, and the Rev. P.N. Ajita who's originally from India and has lived in South Korea for many years. Ajita plans to move to Delhi in order to organize Won interreligious activities, so Leo introduced him by email to Jesuits there.

Later Sunmi Choi invited him to dinner with Rev. Ajita and President Loh Pai Ling of the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia who serves as the interreligious officer of the World Fellowship of Buddhists. Raised within a Mahayana tradition in her Chinese family in Malaysia, she now practices in a Theravada

tradition and thus serves as bridge person among Buddhists. They discussed interreligious relations in Malaysia and beyond and would both welcome conversations with SBCS members.

After attending a beautiful celebration of Gautama Buddha's birthday at which he spoke about Roman Catholic appreciation of the Buddha, Leo met with the Venerable Anil Sakya, whom he had met through an earlier Won Buddhist Interfaith Coalition Conference for Global Citizens (ICCGC). Originally from Nepal, he was a visiting professor at the Jesuit Santa Clara University in California and is now responsible for supervising monastic life in Thailand. They discussed the Thai Buddhist community, interreligious relations, and contacts between Catholics and Buddhists.

Arriving at the Jesuit's group meeting at their Seven Fountains Retreat Center in Chiang Mai, in his presentation Leo described some of the activities of SBCS, including our Statement in Solidarity with Persons of Asian and Pacific Islander Descent during the outbreak of anti-Asian racism in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was significant interest in our activities. Petrus Puspobinatmo, SJ, who is from Indonesia and who works at the Catholic seminary in Yangon, Myanmar, described the difficult situation in Myanmar at present. A leader in the Focolare movement, Tom-Taem Preeyanoot described how she came to a deeper understanding of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths in relation to the suffering of Jesus on the cross. In both traditions she found the power of love as an animating force.

Two of the participants, In-gun Kang, SJ, and Ven. Vy Socochea, work in Cambodia. After Leo's presentation, they invited him to come to Cambodia to lecture at the Royal University of Phnom Penh and at Preah Sihanouk Buddhist University in Battambang, where Vy Socochea teaches. They asked him to give suggestions on how they might strengthen higher education in Cambodia by drawing on their own rich Buddhist heritage of teaching and learning and not simply import western models. He wrote about his time there during the 2023-24 winter

break on our blog: <https://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/perspectives/2024/3/15/cambodia-n-buddhist-encounters>

In August 2023 Leo participated in the ICCGC conference in Seoul with Kuni, Carolyn, and Mark, then he and Kuni visited with people at Sogang University. Both are covered in the Fall 2023 newsletter.

Journal Co-editors Report

Thomas and Kristin brought us the excellent news that this year they, and John as treasurer, reviewed and updated the society's editorial agreement with University of Hawai'i Press. The prior agreement was signed in 1988 by the journal's founding editor David Chappell.

Kristin explained that in some years our journal nets UHP several thousand dollars, but in other years it generates a similar loss. Some losses are due to the added expenses for the recent huge volumes containing papers important to our field from nonSBCS events. Thomas, especially, has worked hard to acquire and edit these. Examples are: 1) the papers from the Tuscan city of Pistoia's 2017 international conference celebrating the 300th anniversary of their native son Ippolito Desideri's Jesuit mission to Tibet, some of which former *BCS* editor Francis Tiso translated, 2) the first English translation, by Michael Sweet and Leonard Zwilling, of da Fano's 1713 *Report* of the Capuchin mission to Tibet, 3) the papers from Rishō-Kōsei-Kai's 2019 Lotus Sutra seminar, and 4) Ryukoku University's Shin Buddhist-Christian-Islamic comparative theology project ending the same year, gathered by long-time SBCS member Dennis Hirota and the European Network of Buddhist-Christian Studies' president Perry Schmidt-Leukel, whom the board was happy to welcome to this year's meeting.

We're grateful to UHP for helping the SBCS make such ground-breaking scholarship available! John reported that we're UHP's second best-selling religion journal. The number of online hits to the journal this year

was 16,300, an increase of 3000 hits over the past three years.

Kristin emphasized that this new agreement, like the old one, makes it clear that the society will never realize a profit or (thankfully!) a loss from our journal. This means the SBCS receives no profits from any libraries' print subscriptions nor from any digital hits, including those through ATLA, Project MUSE, etc. As noted above in the treasurer's report, the new agreement does offer the society two ways in which UHP is willing to offset some of our AAR-related expenses. More importantly, UHP continues to make available to dues-paying SBCS members the yearly copy of the journal included in their membership.

The new agreement is written to: i) go into effect Jan. 1, 2024, ii) continue in force for three calendar years, and iii) extend automatically until terminated. The board unanimously approved a motion by Mark and seconded by Thomas to approve the new agreement.

We're grateful to Kristin, Thomas, John, and UHP's staff for reaffirming a scholarly collaboration that has, for forty-four years, produced the annual periodical that has most deeply shaped, and in many ways defined, the field of Buddhist-Christian studies.

Thomas noted that the journal's perennial problem is still finding manuscript reviewers who will assess and comment upon submissions in a timely fashion. When a graduate student (for example) has submitted an article not suitable for publication in *BCS*, our Social Media and Website Committee chair Jonathan Seitz has sometimes generously offered suggestions for how the author might rework some of its contents into a blog post. The co-editors also reminded the board that finding book reviewers is another perennial challenge.

Executive Associate for Digital Services Report

Chera Jo Watts, who works closely with Jonathan, began by noting the strength of the 2023 blog articles. They range from whimsical but wise reflections on a puppy/Zen master to hopeful but sometimes poignant reports on

Buddhist-Christian relationships gleaned from various conferences in Asia. Chera Jo and Alaina Keller, a Phd student on the Social Media and Website Committee, launched a "Graduate Student Spotlight" blog series this year. Each of their posts about their Phd research sparkle with enthusiasm for the field. Chera Jo nudged the board to encourage grad students to submit such posts, since this would not only benefit the student author by highlighting their research, but would hopefully help grow the grad student component of the society. Alaina, who attended the board meeting via Zoom, reminded the rest of the board that hosting at least one paper session *online* would make our programming more accessible to graduate students, internationally.

When Chera Jo asked what questions board members had about the various digital processes she helps perform, Kristin expressed puzzlement about how complicated compiling the membership list seems to be. Also puzzled, John asked why the membership number he derived from the data he uses is lower than the number sent to UHP. Chera Jo said that, although the membership list had already been compiled the year she was hired, she'd been carefully walked through the process by Alicia Brown, who then managed the website. Compiling the membership list became complicated because the website developed incrementally over ten years of rapidly changing technology. Our membership data interacts with three different financial web apps, not all of which every board member who uses the membership data can access. Plus, the membership data is constantly shifting.

By the end of this discussion, Chera Jo and John had located and unclogged a blockage in the flow of membership-related data that neither one of them had been aware existed. After a jubilant "Aha!" moment, the two of them left the entire board relieved and happy.

Social Media and Website Committee Report
Committee chair Jonathan Seitz, who teaches in Taipei, greeted everyone online near the beginning of our morning meeting since it was

already quite late there. He had emailed the board a written report, which I'll summarize here.

The committee met at the beginning of 2023 with Chera Jo. Jonathan's report explained that, in addition to keeping track of the membership payments and mailing lists, her responsibilities involve interacting with multiple groups: the board (especially the editors), UHP, and multiple software companies and platforms. She also manages logistics like moderating our blog and Facebook page, soliciting posts, and troubleshooting membership issues.

His report notes that when the membership data had been compiled to be sent to UHP, twelve members (including two board members and some former board members) did not show up on the list when the data was run, due to a coding error. Jonathan wrote that he hoped that, when the board met, that John (who as treasurer works closely with this committee) could bring before the board the issue of the current sustainability of our current digital systems. He did. John and Chera Jo's discussion at the board meeting about a related, but different data flow issue, described in the section above, pointed out eloquently that the mismatch between our current website's multiple, inherited web apps and the demands of current safe, online technology is making it hard for both Chera Jo and our volunteer board members to perform their regular tasks.

The website had 5.9k visitors last year. 5.1k were unique. There were 12k page views. They published significantly more blog posts this year than in prior years. Our Facebook group has 2.2k members, up from last year. It was a very successful year for this committee!

To facilitate Chera Jo's annual post-meeting update of the board webpage, Jonathan asked new board members to send her their preferred name, affiliation, photo and bio. It would be wonderful, too, for everyone else to check if their bio needs an update. It would also improve the website if they could send photos of pertinent events.

Jonathan expressed gratitude to the society and especially the board for adapting to his participating only online, post-pandemic. He recounted that he began serving on the board around 2009, when I suggested him for newsletter editor, since he'd been a delight to work with on a theology journal. He edited and managed the SBCS newsletter for eight years. Now, after many years as Social Media chair, he's decided to retire from that position when his current term ends at the 2024 meeting, unless he and his successor decide to make that transition sooner. He's hoping to do more writing about Protestantism and pluralism. We hope some of it appears in *Buddhist-Christian Studies*!

General Discussion of Future Programming

Early in this discussion that Mark led, Leo pointed out that our two online annual meetings during the pandemic's isolation provided an increase in international conversation within the society's programs like its former face-to-face international conferences had provided. The increase in international conversation during the society's early years was due to a strong Japanese contingent's attendance at all but the last SBCS international conference. They sometimes organized sessions with papers presented in Japanese.

Our paper session audience during our first online annual meeting, generously hosted by Georgetown's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs drew the biggest, most international and most economically diverse audience we've ever hosted. This was due not only to the Berkley Center's decision not to charge an online registration fee, but also their publicity of our programs. We're still grateful for the additional members and additions to our email list!

On the other hand, Leo pointed out, online meetings can't provide the same extended time for deepening international friendships during meals, optional practice sessions, and free time that our international conferences had provided. The society's Friday night fellowship events during AAR have provided in some of this, some of the time, but in small amounts.

I've listed below some of the possibilities suggested and comments made during our rich discussion:

Online public programming and resource options:

- Use AAR's video conference platform. Choosing this option would mean that everyone who'd present within, or view our sessions, would have to pay AAR a registration fee. Since AAR's approach to online conferences keeps changing, we don't know what other fees, if any, the society itself might be assessed.
- Use the platform of one of our board member's institutions who could host us for free and perhaps provide publicity.
- Use a video conference platform we'd purchase as part of a website package.
- Arrange for regional face-to-face hubs. This could be done regardless of what video conference platform we use. The Yale-Edinburgh Group (World Christianity) has had mostly good experiences with this, but the planning is labor intensive.
- Schedule online events on an ad hoc basis when a board or committee member has an idea for an event and the board approves as the designated organizer. Several board members strongly recommended that if we were to go this route we create an online events checklist.
- Create podcasts to post on the website. If any long-time members give us permission, we could post their interviews for the oral history project.

Mark suggested if we decide to host live online events, perhaps we should create a board position to take responsibility for this. If we do, it might be wise to create an online program committee to do some of the work.

In-person public programming options:

- Hold all our annual meeting events in space we purchase from AAR as an RSO,
- Hold our paper sessions in conjunction with AAR, but hold fellowship and learning times in donated or less expensive space that's accessible from AAR's location via walking, public transportation, or an inexpensive shuttle. These could be scheduled right before, right after, or during AAR. Possible venues are temples, churches, B&B's, retreat centers, universities, and private rooms in restaurants. We could draw on members' religious and academic networks to find free or inexpensive venues. Several long-time board members testified to how important such events had been to them, including John and myself. I decided, while talking with Ruben Habito, Rita Gross, and Harry Wells over pizza delivered to a downtown church gym on Friday evening, that I wanted to join and invest my time in the society.
- Create a board position or committee for organizing public fellowship and learning events.
- Organize public fellowship and learning events on an ad hoc basis, having created a how-to checklist for designated organizers.
- Organize a multi-day retreat. This could or could not be scheduled close in time and space to an AAR meeting. The level of financial risk would be a major issue given the society's experience in the past.
- Another option would be to rotate online and in-person paper sessions on a yearly basis.

Online board business meeting and other event options:

- Use the platform of one of our board member's institutions who could host us for free.

- Use a video conference platform we'd purchase as part of a website package.
- If the meeting is hybrid, designate someone as webmaster to reduce the need for presidential multi-tasking.

In-person board business meeting and other event options:

- Hold all in-person board business meetings and fellowship and learning events in AAR space.
- Hold only one of our business meeting sessions in-person in AAR space if we've already met online for routine reports. Then we could meet someplace cheaper nearby for board fellowship and learning, especially if we'd eventually like to offer a public multi-day program.
- Add organizing in-person fellowship and learning to an existing board position's duties.
- Create a board position or committee to organize board fellowship and learning events.
- Schedule a catered lunch for the board either in a AAR room or nearby on Friday if that remains our business meeting day.

After we'd discussed online and in-person board business meeting and fellowship and learning options, Mark remarked that it's easier, at least for him, to preside in person where he can better read people's emotions. The downside is, as Peter had noted, the high cost of AAR meeting space. Carolyn posed this question about how the board would use its time: "How do we generate that inner bridge so that we're more than just people who sit around a board table. . . . I think there's a real need for what we're talking about in the world. We have such knowledge and wisdom in this room."

Noting that other academic groups also share time in fellowship and learning, Mark reflected that "It's especially apt for our group and can increase the depth and creativity of what we do, because we're coming together not just as academic intellectuals." In light of the fact that many board members are active practitioners in

either churches or sanghas or some other religious path, he asserted: "So there's an additional incentive for us to feed off each other's experience and wisdom and knowledge to do that kind of sharing, which can be really rewarding" because the society's work is "not just intellectual work" since each of us has indicated in one way or another that we have "a commitment to a normative vision" we're each "trying to embrace. It's kind of a unique situation. Regardless of whether we are dual belonging or not, we've all been transformed by the religious other. We're missing something if we don't take advantage of that."

Mark summarized "What I'm sensing is that for next year we're going to change the format so that we will schedule the business meeting at another time, but we'll still come together, and the most likely day is Friday, either half day or all day, and we'll have it be about fellowship and learning."

JK suggested: "Maybe we meet via Zoom, maybe the beginning of November, or before AAR, then when we come together, something more. If there are several issues we need to discuss, we discuss those, but the main focus is fellowship and learning."

Carolyn, who'll be presiding next year, said she could arrange the online business meeting through University of Georgia. Duane, JK and John advised drawing on local resources and venues for our non-business programming, with John suggesting the University of San Diego.

Mark concluded with a motion for the board to schedule an online format business meeting prior to AAR and schedule at least one in-person gathering for fellowship and learning during the week of AAR that the executive committee would plan. Peter seconded. The motion passed with no objections.

Streng Book Award Committee Report

Mark gave the report rather than the committee's chair, Peter Feldmeier, because the committee decided that Peter's book *Experiments in Buddhist-Christian Encounter*:

From Buddha-Nature to the Divine Nature should be given the award.

Taking what Mark called an "episodic approach," the book begins with early Buddhism and presents nine pairs of a Buddhist and a Christian teacher or movement. Speaking as a Shin Buddhist priest, and noting how often Christian scholarship on Pure Land traditions has emphasized perceived commonalities and minimized the differences, Mark said, "Although I appreciate all the Buddhist-Christian scholarship about Pure Land, it often overlooks the different logical structure of Shin, which goes back to Nagarjuna and even earlier" He said that Peter, in contrast, "represents Pure Land Buddhism, especially Shin, better than even Buddhist Studies scholars who specialize in Pure Land . . . Peter represents accurately the two largest streams of Buddhism worldwide - Chan Zen and Shin Pure Land- but in a way that's very distinctive in comparison to, say, Mark Heim." (In his 2018 book *Crucified Wisdom: Theological Reflection on Christ and the Boddhisattva*, Heim discusses some of the deep differences as well as potential common ground between Pure Land and Christian traditions.) Mark went on: "Throughout, Peter represents differences as just as significant as commonalities. That's really important if you're a Buddhist."

Mark attributed the depth of Peter's accurate perceptions of Buddhists not only to his deep background in philosophy of religion and comparative theology but also to his decades of serious practice within Buddhist traditions. It appears to me that Peter's careful, Roman Catholic Buddhist-Christian scholarship does not suffer from the tendency of some of the early Catholic Buddhist-Christian scholarship to be over-anxiously synthetic by, for example, echoing Rahner's "anonymous Christians" approach to virtuous non-Christian religious practitioners. Mark said: "He's not so synthetic. But, the synthetic 'Christian Heart Sutra,' with which he concludes his book, is great."

In the book's first chapter, within the section titled "The Aim of This Book," Peter recounts that, after his three-month Vipassana retreat, he

still attended daily mass and studied the Christian scriptures daily. He writes, "I am certainly not a Buddhist-Christian; I am a Christian." His Christian Heart Sutra is indeed distinctly Christian, but Mark's appreciative words seemed to me to indicate that it can prompt deep, distinctly Buddhist responses.

During the comments after the hearty applause that followed the award announcement, Peter said, looking across the corner of the table at the visiting president of the European Network, "Perry's book on Shantideva is one of the best books I've ever read." Wrapping up the Streng Committee report, Mark stated that the committee needs to, and has, recognized different genres of Buddhist-Christian scholarship, like the awards for Ayo's Yetunde's and Sallie King's books on social reform.

Board Meeting Wrap-Up

Mark adjourned the meeting after reminding us that most board members practice in a Buddhist or Christian tradition, and some in both. This give us more than an intellectual stake in the society's work: work which many board members have said they've found transformational in some way. I agree! Friendships formed within the society have helped many of us envision and try to foster peace across differences with more hope.

Saturday Members Meeting

I was unable to attend the members meeting this year, but after Mark Unno had passed on the presidency to Carolyn Medine during that meeting, he affirmed in an email to me that the group had ratified:

- the board slate including Joseph Cheah, Stephanie Wong, and Christina Atienza,
- his interim assumption of the treasurer's duties while also serving as vice-president,
- the approval of a new agreement with University of Hawai'i Press,
- the formation of a new Oral History and Archives standing committee.



Kunihiko Terasawa and Leo Lefebure Visit to Taiwan

Leo D. Lefebure
Georgetown University

In February and March 2024, Kunihiko Terasawa and I visited Fu Jen Catholic University in Taipei and Buddhist monasteries in Taiwan. On February 29, Kuni gave a very engaging presentation on the thought of Kitaro Nishida, and we had a lively discussion of Nishida's contributions and his relation to Japanese nationalism, followed by lunch with members of the faculty of Fu Jen. The next day Professor Su-an Lin, who teaches Buddhism at Fu Jen, and graduate student Su-chen Huang, accompanied Kuni and me to Fo Guang Shan Monastery, where we received an informative tour of the monastic community, a delicious lunch, and then a guided tour of the Buddha Museum, including the remarkable exhibit on the discoveries at Dunhuang, including full-scale replicas of the statues and murals in the Mogao Caves. To conclude our visit, we were treated to tea and were given Lewis Lancaster's book on The Buddhist Maritime Silk Road and a book of Buddhist meditations for each day of the year.

On March 3, we received a guided visit to the Museum of World Religions in Taipei, founded by Dharma Master Hsin Tao. Two days later, together with Paulin Batairwa, Under-Secretary of the Vatican Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, and Raphael Ling, vice president of Fu Jen University for mission and chaplaincy, I visited Master Hsin Tao at his monastery situated on a high spot dramatically overlooking the ocean. We had an extended discussion of interreligious activities, and the Dharma Master

told us of his project to found a Buddhist university in Myanmar and sought our support. On March 5, Paulin, Raphael, and I visited Dharma Drum Mountain Monastery outside of Taipei, where we were graciously welcomed by the Ven. Guo Hei, who gave us copies of books by their founder, the late Chan Master Sheng-yen.

I delivered two lectures at Fu Jen; our SBCS colleague Jonathan Seitz, who teaches in Taipei, came to meet me for lunch and attended my second lecture on spirit, law, and wisdom in interreligious encounters. Together with Paulin, I also met with leaders of the Daoist Temple in Taipei and participated in a Vatican-led discussion of Catholic-Confucian relations.

Membership



If you haven't renewed for 2023-4, please do so now. Membership includes our newsletters, our journal, and other benefits. [You can renew via our website.](#)

Some of you have asked about how membership works. Here is a brief Question & Answer.

What are current dues?

Dues range from \$10 for students to \$25 for Adjunct Professors, Independent Scholars, and Assistant Professors and \$45 for Associate and Full Professors.

What are the terms of membership?

You may join or renew at any point during the calendar year, although it is more convenient to join at the start. Membership is for the current year (2023), but regardless of

when you join you receive the same benefits for that year.

What is included in annual membership?

All memberships include an annual print copy of *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, inclusion on our email list (two e-newsletters), and voting rights in member meetings.

How does membership contribute to broader Buddhist-Christian cooperation?

Our dues support a variety of recent efforts. We have worked to make the Journal more easily available, have added it to our webpage (for instance, it includes the last 13+ years of newsletters), and continue to work on ways to connect scholars.

Write for us! (Submitting a Blog Post)

A long-term goal of SBCS has been to offer community members a chance to interact and share news, opinions, and resources via our updated and improved website. We are looking for blog posts on a variety of topics:

- News updates about conferences, events, courses, or other resources
- Topical discussions of important issues
- Posts about pedagogy, teaching, syllabus development, creative exercises, or other topics
- Interviews, samples, or reviews of SBCS member books

Blog posts are vetted by our social media committee and will appear on the website.

Typically, we will also post the blog to our Facebook page; we may ask for permission to use it elsewhere. An ideal post:

- Engages the intersection of Buddhist and Christian traditions
- Is approximately 800 words in length
- Includes an image
- Offers a short bio of the author (25-50 words) and contact info

Please visit our blog for more information:

<https://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/about-the-blog>

Also, check out our Facebook page and give it a like:

<https://www.facebook.com/BuddhistChristianStudies/>

To Nominate a Book for the Streng Award

The book must have been published within the last five years. Nominations can be made by any person using the [online form](#). The completed form may be sent electronically to Peter Feldmeier, (Peter.Feldmeier@utoledo.edu), who will respond to all nominations.

Nominations are now welcomed. Publishers of books must be willing to supply review copies to members of the committee for evaluation in order for the book to be considered.

CONTRIBUTE A REPORT TO THE NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY FOR BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

Editor: John Becker
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The *Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Newsletter* is published twice annually: in the spring and the fall. Please contact the Editor to share information with our readers. The deadline for the Spring issue is March 15.

In addition to reports on our annual meeting (concurrent with the American Academy of Religion) and calls for the Frederick Streng Book Award for Excellence in Buddhist-Christian Studies and for the Graduate Student Essay Prize, the *Newsletter* also publishes information on conferences, retreats, lectures, and other events. We welcome obituaries and reports on significant figures in the field of Buddhist-Christian Studies.

We are always grateful for information, news, or other submissions that members and others can share with the Society. Submissions may be edited for clarity and length. Send items to newsletter editor John.Becker@csulb.edu.