**From: Harlan Beckley and Rebecca Miles**

Dear Colleagues:

We have consulted with a variety of people, including the American Council of Learned Societies, Darlene Fozard Weaver from the Board of Directors, and Tim Smeeding, an economist at the University of Wisconsin.  Tim spoke on behalf of Rebecca Blank, UW economist, and Marcy Carlson, his spouse and a UW sociologist.  We have also talked with others, including recent presidents of other academic societies, and plan to continue seeking advice without conducting comprehensive surveys.  In light of these consultations and our own observations and conclusions, we recommend the following.

* The Board of Directors could consider immediate action to change the conditions of lifetime membership to include some dues based on income.  The SCE could also encourage lifetime members to contribute to the SCE.  Even though lifetime members often have sources of income that enable them to pay some dues and to pay for annual meetings, any income-based requirements should consider that retired persons no longer have access to institutional support for dues or for annual meeting participation. Perhaps they could pay a reduce schedule of dues and be exempted from income-based indexes for meeting costs. We do not believe this change needs to be part of a strategic plan, but if the SCE Board wishes to refer it to a strategic planning committee, we understand.  We also understand that this recommendation about membership overlaps with the work of Angela Sims and Tim Sedgwick on enhancing revenues.  Harlan Beckley, a lifetime member, endorses a change in the current practicing exempting lifetime members from dues. (Another option for lifetime members would be to have a scale for recommended donations in place of dues)
* Along similar lines, we recommend considering more active follow up with members delinquent in dues payment, reminding them on multiple occasions that they will lose membership benefits if they do not pay dues and that the SCE depends on annual dues from its members. This might be more effective if it came as a message from the president, an automated individual email. In addition, we recommend that those whose membership has lapsed, even for an extended period, remain on the email and mailing lists and receive all the regular communications. These recommendations do not seem to require referral to a strategic planning committee.
* More boldly—and certainly items for a strategic planning committee—we recommend that the SCE consider expanding categories of membership and commensurately its mission and marketing for membership.  (A more open membership policy would be in line with the policies of many other academic organizations according to reports from the American Council of Learned Societies. See attached.) New categories could include:
  + Social scientists (especially sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and economists) who have normative and religious interests, even though these interests may not be manifest in their scholarship.  Tim Smeeding has recommended several groups and persons that we might want to contact, including Arthur Brooks, former head of AEI and now at Harvard.  Tim’s recommendations also suggest that the extent of these social scientists’ interest should influence marketing of SCE membership to this group. Amy Jonason, a young, tenure-track sociologist at Furman University, was sufficiently interested that she suggested that we contact the chair of the religion section of the American Sociological Association.
  + Academic lawyers have also shown an interest in Christian and religious ethics as informing their scholarly work, professional ethics and criminal justice in particular. It seems that we have done little to tap this interest by publicizing the SCE in law schools.
  + Community organizers and activists like William Barber, who is heading a new poor people’s campaign, may have both an interest in social justice advocacy and in critical ethical reflection on justice and on their own work.  Some, not all, would come with both educational and scholarly credentials, but all could meet some criteria to determine their interest in sustained ethical reflection. We would want their interest in ethics to transcend advocacy for just causes, but it would, of course, include such advocacy. In addition to talking with Amy Jonason at Furman, we have talked with a Washington and Lee sociologist about both social scientists and community organizers, and he thinks it plausible that some will be interested.
  + There are some philosophers of religion and philosophical ethicists who have an interest in the intersection between Christian and religious ethics and their discipline. We have not publicized to this group. A conversation with a recently tenured philosopher at Furman University, Aaron Simmons, indicates possible interest among some colleagues in his discipline. He is familiar with the SCE and our journal by being a friend of Kevin Carnahan.
  + Theologians may have an interest in ethics.  We have attracted some of this group, e.g., John Shelley from Furman and Doug Ottati from Davidson (who has served as an SCE President), but we have missed others, e.g., Douglas Meeks, professor emeritus from Vanderbilt.  In this case, we might achieve our goal by changing our marketing focus with no need change membership criteria, our mission, membership status, or dues structure. We have spoken with Shelley, Ottati, and Meeks about expanding our marketing focus to include more academics and scholars who consider themselves theologians and also teachers of scripture.
  + Church ministers and church-related community organizers—perhaps similar to Barber—may also be interested in academic Christian ethics.  The SCE has some members from this category who have requisite degrees and publications, but we may want to adjust our marketing, mission, and membership criteria to attract more.  Again, our criteria for membership should include indications of interest in ethics as a discipline-based study and not merely practical ministerial and pastoral concerns.
  + For several categories above—social scientists, academic lawyers, philosophers, and community organizers—it is highly unlikely that we could persuade them to pay full membership dues for SCE membership or to come annually to SCE meetings.  Employers are not likely to provide funding and time to support multiple academic society memberships beyond specialized disciplines and professional activities.  We would have to devise an associate membership arrangement at reduced annual dues, which would keep this group informed of SCE activities, especially annual meetings, without providing comprehensive benefits such as the journal.  We could not expect annual attendance at meetings, but we could make it possible for this group to propose occasional interdisciplinary papers bearing on religious ethics that could inform Christian, Jewish, and Muslim ethicists, and the social scientists and community organizers would learn more about what ethicists are doing that might bear on their scholarship, teaching, and professional work.
  + We might strengthen this outreach if the SJC and SME also reached out to parallel groups for membership in their organizations.
* In order to accommodate all or some of these new membership categories, we would need to review and revise our mission to include—not merely the advancement of religious ethics as a discipline—but also the contributions that religious and Christian ethics can make to other academic disciplines, community organizers, theology, and to church ministries—and that these others could offer to Christian ethics. A strategic planning committee could work on that revision in tandem with working on membership and marketing.
* To reach potential members in these categories a strategic planning committee will need to consider how we publicize or market SCE membership and to whom we publicize it. Tim Smeeding especially has made specific recommendations for groups within universities or with ecclesial organizations to contact, e.g., the LEO Lab at Notre Dame or the Wisconsin Council of Churches Advocacy Group, to which Tim belongs. Amy Jonason made parallel recommendations for publicity to the ASA.
* Also, Jean Porter and Dan Finn have not advocated considering regional annual or occasional meetings or themed meetings at universities and colleges on topics co-sponsored by the SCE.  We also do not advocate a move in that direction, but if a strategic planning committee believes such additional conferences might attract new members, it may want to use the survey method proposed by Finn and Porter to test the level of interest in such additional meetings. Such additional meetings might conceivably be of special interest to some of those from these new categories of possible members.
* Tim Sedgwick, Porter and Finn have suggested possible funding from the Lilly, Luce, or Templeton Foundations.  According to Darlene Weaver, who currently has a Luce grant to explore augmenting public theology, we are not likely to gain funding for particular SCE programming but may be able to have an SCE member or even a planning group receive funding to explore a new initiative regarding meetings or membership—especially if it were to expand our public relevance as an ethics society—not just as another social advocacy group.  We think these options for supporting or even funding a strategic planning process may have merit.
* In conversations with officers of other academic societies and especially in reviewing recent reports of the American Council of Learned Societies, we note that many academic societies in the humanities, including theology/religious studies, are doing very well in membership, attendance, and finances. (See those reports attached.) This raises two questions in our minds. First, are the problems that the SCE seem to be facing linked not to larger changes in academia and academic societies, but to something that we are doing or not doing? Second, do we understand the extent and specifics of the problems we face? As we have noted repeatedly in our conversations and correspondence, we need more data. We strongly affirm the recommendation of Finn and Porter that someone be hired, maybe a graduate student, to sort through the records to look for patterns, especially regarding membership and attendance.
* Finally, we also note that several scholarly societies in the practical/pastoral theological fields report (Academy of Homiletics and the Society for Pastoral Theology) that they have initiated similar conversations about funding and membership. Perhaps we should be in conversation with these groups about their findings.

