



January 21, 2009

Dear SBL Members,



I am writing on behalf of the SBL Council to announce to the Society membership the decision of Kent Richards to retire as Executive Director of the Society of Biblical Literature effective June 30, 2010. It is with regret that we contemplate the end of his time in leadership of the Society, but we wish to face the necessary transitions ahead in a spirit of celebration for the many contributions Kent has made to leave a strengthened and vigorous Society as his legacy.

Under his leadership the program of the Annual Meeting has expanded and diversified; the International Meeting has become a major forum of global biblical scholarship; the membership has grown; the Society has strengthened its reputation as a major and respected publisher; the Society has played a leading role in the American Council of Learned Societies; a major initiative on teaching Bible in the public schools has been developed; an outstanding staff team has been recruited and organized; and the Society has enjoyed financial stability, strong fiscal management, and excellent administrative leadership. Especially noteworthy has been Kent's steady hand, discerning judgment and wise council in the difficult circumstances of the unanticipated withdrawal of the AAR from joint sponsorship of the Annual Meeting. The unqualified success of the first SBL Annual Meeting held recently in Boston independent from the AAR is in no small measure a testimony to Kent's leadership in this period. If, as seems likely, some new relationship with the AAR in future Annual Meetings becomes a reality, this too will reflect Kent's careful guidance through difficult issues and circumstances. It is hard to imagine how the Society could have been served any better by its Executive Director during this unusual period.

I have no doubt that the next two years will see many opportunities to recognize and celebrate Kent Richards' contributions to the Society of Biblical Literature, but I have chosen to begin that celebration now by soliciting several comments from colleagues who have worked closely with Kent during his tenure as Executive Director.

Kent Richards has provided extraordinary leadership for the Society of Biblical Literature. An energetic visionary, he has also provided a steady hand in the administration of the Society in challenging circumstances. We wish him well in retirement. *Harold Attridge, Yale University.*

Kent Richards has successfully envisioned and shaped a future for the society that makes possible the richest forms of interdisciplinary conversation. The number and variety of programs at the annual and international meetings are a testament to his understanding of the diverse scholarly, professional, and religious communities of our contemporary world. He has led the society in connecting the world of information technology with the work of biblical research. Having brought to his work the background and perspective of a biblical scholar and teacher, he knows the value of collegiality and has operated as a trusted and valued colleague even as he has performed the many intricate and difficult tasks of managerial leadership. Kent has been a visionary, innovative, and steady leader who has richly prepared the Society for its work in the 21st century. *Brian Blount, Union Theological Seminary in Richmond.*

Kent Richards has provided visionary leadership during a formative period of the Society. SBL is now the envy of many ACLS organizations, what with its vigorous meetings and publication program. *David Petersen, Emory University.*

Kent's vision for the future of biblical studies, his willingness to do the work necessary to move us toward that vision, his attention to detail, and his gracious and hospitable leadership style have been marvelous gifts to the Society. We owe him a particular debt of thanks for working to increase the visibility of scholarship by underrepresented constituencies across the globe. *Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, Princeton Theological Seminary.*

A search committee for Kent's successor has been named and will be announced in the near future. A position announcement and statement on the search process will be posted soon on the SBL website and circulated widely. Please watch for these important announcements. We are grateful that Kent Richards has given us a strong, healthy and productive professional society through his leadership. That in itself will help make the transition to a new leadership a smooth one.

Sincerely,

Bruce C. Birch
Chair, SBL Council