

Religion & Media UPDATE

Newsletter of the Religion & Media Interest Group of the Association of Educators of Journalism and Mass Communication



Photo by Joe Grimm

Journalism students hear about the role German inventor Johannes Gutenberg and his movable type printing scheme played in early Anabaptism.

Class meets Amish challenge

By Joe Grimm

Michigan State University

Michigan State students always encounter roadblocks as they report for their 100-question cultural competence guides. The challenges in making the little books, now numbering about 20, include social or cultural knowledge gaps, language barriers

A Black Church guide, page 4

and physical distance.

But this fall's "100 Questions and Answers About Mennonites and the Amish" posed some of the greatest challenges.

Bias Busters, as we call the guides, address ethnic, racial, gender, occu-

*Please see **AMISH** on page 3*

Note from the Head

Our goals are more papers and a crop of new scholars

By Kathryn Montalbano
Appalachian State University

Dear RMIG colleagues,

Thank you so

much for granting me this opportunity to serve as your new Head along with Cylor Spaulding, your new Vice Head.

We are proud of the excellent work that RMIG

put forth in Detroit last August, and we are already preparing for next August's annual conference in Washington, D.C.

As former Head Brian Bowe and I discussed at our July meeting we

*Please see **HEAD** on page 2*



Kathryn Montalbano

Head: Religion intersects so many spheres

Continued from page 1

have marked several goals for the upcoming year, including to recruit new members (with particular attention to graduate students and early-career scholars) and to increase the number of paper submissions (aiming to create interdisciplinary panels that will attract a wide audience).

Please help us reach this goal by encouraging colleagues in the field to submit their work to RMIG. We also encourage you to submit your own informal pieces for the newsletter to increase the frequency of our communication with one another.

The location of the next conference in Washington reminds us of the longstanding intersection of religion and politics in the United States, and the implications of that intersection for nation-states and cultures well beyond U.S. borders.

As Habermas (2011) has argued, religious and non-religious individuals may very well translate religious arguments in the public sphere in a way that provides a common moral ground for all.

We are reminded of the significance of this public communication with the recent major changes brought about in the Supreme Court, particularly with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and the

siding with a high school football coach who prayed with players on the field.

Analogously, we as religion and media scholars are in a unique position to translate the significance of our subfield of religion and media to both our field and to those peripheral to or outside of academia. Across a range of foci amongst us – including, but not limited to, how religion operates within journalism, advertising, and public relations – it is important for us to communicate our own research to our students, colleagues, friends, and family. Understanding the role of religion in public life is integral to all of our livelihoods, whether or not we identify as religious or spiritual.

While many of us emphasize the intersection of religion with other spheres of life, it is also important to remember that religion has value autonomously of how it manifests in other spheres.

Former RMIG Head and my colleague at App State, Greg Perreault, and I recently analyzed how religion reporters conceptualize their role within the broader field of journalism, particularly given the gradual decline of the religion beat within the field. These reporters, we found, acknowledged their beat as “the lesser-brother to the political beat.”

They also suggested that reli-

gion reporting is limited “by how the larger publication understands religion . . . or doesn’t understand that.” In many ways, religion and media scholars are similarly tasked with advocating the crucial role that religion plays in all areas of our field and of life, beyond the restrictive boxes that society may place on it.

There is perhaps no better way to maintain and develop our subfield than to support and mentor graduate students and early-career scholars.

As such, RMIG is starting a new spotlight series in the newsletter that features these scholars through their biographies, research and teaching interests, and forthcoming or past publications. Please encourage anyone who may be interested in contributing to this series to submit this information to me for future newsletters.

Cylor and I look forward to an exciting year filled with collaboration and innovation in religion and media through some excellent panels and the annual Sacred Spaces tour in D.C. We hope to see you there.

Kathryn (Katie) Montalbano

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Serving the Religion & Media Interest Group for 2022-23

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Amish: Interviews take plain ingenuity

Continued from page 1

pational and age groups. In recent years, most have been faith-based. The 2022 guides were about the Black Church and Sikh Americans. This fall our subject, plain people, as Anabaptists are called, proved to be role models in finding workarounds.

When cellphones and large-grid electrification threaten the desire to free themselves from technology, Anabaptists relegate their cellphone to an outbuilding or generate their own power.

When it comes to maintaining their religious rights while practicing peaceful nonresistance, Anabaptists have won court cases with legal defenses, not as aggressors.

And when it comes to getting around when a horse and buggy won't do, the Amish rely on secular friends, whom they call "the English," to drive them.



Joe Grimm

Plain people set the example for students tasked with the daunting prospect of profiling people who try to live apart from society and avoid phones, cameras and the internet.

Whom would the students interview? How could they connect with people who might not use cellphones, email or cars? How could students quickly get to know private people who don't like to be rushed or be the center of attention?

The range of ideas and approaches is reflected in "What the Amish Teach Us: Plain Living in a Busy World," one of well more than a dozen books by Donald B. Kraybill of Elizabethtown College.

Kraybill and his publishing and Elizabethtown colleague Steven M. Nolt were key organizers of "[The Amish Conference](#)" held in Pennsyl-



Photo by Joe Grimm

The Michigan State Bias Busters class seems to become part of a scene of Anabaptists, the people they are writing their guide about.

vania in June. The gathering provided sources, resources, methods and ideas for this Bias Busters project.

Students adapted, just as Anabaptists adapt every day. Some drove out to an Amish community, difficult to reach online, because interviews had to be face to face. They talked to people as they worked.

Most of the class spent MSU's homecoming Saturday on a field trip to the [Menno-Hof information center](#) in Shippshewana, Indiana, learning about Mennonite, Amish and Hutterite faiths. People working in that educational setting did not have a problem being interviewed; it is part of their community's outreach.

Students worked their social media networks for friends who are friends of plain people, including a collegiate baseball player who learned to play in his Mennonite community growing up.

Authentic, non-invasive photography for the guide's cover seemed to be a step beyond. Stock photo services do not meet our standards of authenticity. Students found that the right sources and approaches can lead to photography. Mennonites, for example, share many of the values of the newer Amish people, but

are more relaxed on daily practices. We are relying on the 18,000-image [Dennis L. Hughes collection](#) of photographs of Amish life and culture at Elizabethtown College.

In one stroke of luck, an Amish grandfather in Indiana who had agreed to be a guest speaker by phone demurred through his English contact. The alternative was a 21-year-old at The Amish & Mennonite Heritage Center in Millersburg, Ohio, who agreed to, yes, Zoom.

He had a great sense of humor and a storehouse of ideas about what questions the guide should answer.

Several sources agreed to talk, but true to their values of humility declined to be credited in the guide.

The students learned that, as with all religions and groups of people, there is tremendous variety among plain people. You just have to adapt.

You can find the Bias Busters series on Amazon. "100 Questions and Answers About Mennonites and the Amish" will be out in 2023.

RMIG member Joe Grimm is a Michigan State University professor and founding editor of the Bias Busters series. <https://news.jrn.msu.edu/culturalcompetence/>

‘We’ draw closer to Black Church with Detroit tour, Bias Buster guide

By Joe Grimm

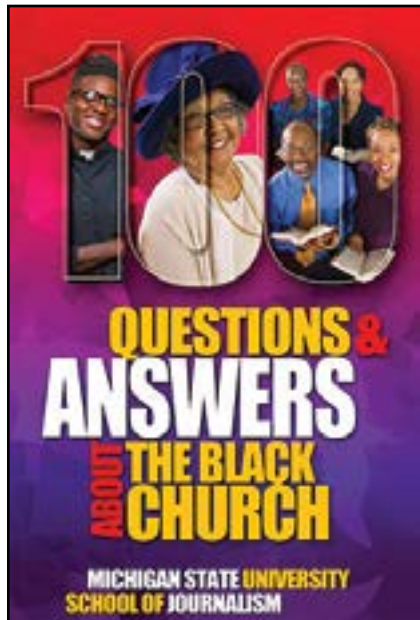
Michigan State University

“Our Song: Social Activism and Music of the Black Church as Experienced through the Eyes and Ears of Detroit” tied many strands together: church, music, the civil rights struggle and much that is Black Detroit.

AEJMC-Detroit would have been incomplete without this session sponsored by RMIG and the Commission on the Status of Minorities.

The Rev. Robert Jones punctuated the evolution of the personal salvation hymn “I’ll Over Come Someday” to the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.”

Dr. Deborah Smith Pollard of the University of Michigan-Dearborn showed how the dichotomy between sacred and secular music is not that at all. The music connects; it does not divide. She describes this in her book, “When the Church Becomes Your Party: Contemporary Gospel Music.”



[Click here for a video from the Black Church presentation during August’s AEJMC conference.](#)

LaRisa Anderson, doctoral candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, enthused about how Black Church music is

finding new channels and audiences on social media. Heads in the know bobbed in agreement. There might have been a few “Amens.”

Dr. Nathaniel Frederick II, Winthrop University, organized with Anderson, played bandleader for the session and presented from the depths of his research.

Detroiter Freda Sampson, self-described “preacher’s kid” to the Rev. Frederick G. Sampson II, brought passion and love for the Black Church and concerns for its future. She is author of “‘I Think I Said Something...’ The Life, Legacy & Ministry of Rev. Dr. Frederick G. Sampson, II.” At the end of the AEJMC session she helped distribute copies of a just-released guide she edited, “100 Questions and Answers About the Black Church: A Social and Spiritual Journey.”

As Jones posed in his “overcoming” musical opener, “How do we move from ‘I’ to ‘we’? And then, have we gone so far past ‘we’ that we’re now stuck in I? So, if we can figure out how this song, which we all recognize as an anthem of the civil rights moment, started out as a functional anthem of salvation and how it was modified, then the question becomes, how do we take this, music which is adaptable, and adapt it to the situation that we’re living in?”

The guide is 20th in the Bias Busters series produced by students in a journalism class at Michigan State University. RMIG member Joe Grimm is founder of the series. For a copy of the Black Churches guide or information other religious groups in this series or how students publish, email joe.grimm@gmail.com.

All it takes is a whole lot of “We.”



Photo by Joe Grimm

ISKCON Detroit, one of the top temples of the Hare Krishna movement, resides in a 1920s mansion purchased almost 50 years ago.



Above, the RMIG tour includes Congregation Shaarey Zedek. Below, the backdrop of a mosque makes for an unforgettable selfie.



Above, the Basilica of St. Anne. At left, an important church during the Civil Rights Movement.

International religion journalists meet to discuss challenging European landscape

By Joel Campbell

Brigham Young University

CORDOBA, Spain -- More than 20 international religion journalists found common ground during a two-day meeting here exploring the European religious landscape and addressing contemporary challenges to religion reporting.



Joel Campbell

Meeting Sept 22-23, journalists represented diverse nations including Spain, Israel, Pakistan, Argentina, Netherlands, United States, Qatar, Germany, Canada, Egypt and Serbia.

The event was hosted by the International Association of Religion Journalists (IARJ) and was made possible by generous grants from the Brigham Young University's International Center for Law and Religion Studies, as well as the Utah Journalism Foundation and the Khosrow Semnani Foundation.

Members of Religion and Media Interest Group are invited to join the group without charge at <https://www.theiarj.org/>

Cordoba, known as a historic center for Islam, Christianity and Judaism, provided a unique backdrop for the discussion.

The magnificent Mosque-Cathedral in Cordoba's old city still inspires visitors.

As Martin Davis, a Virginia journalist who attended the conference, wrote in a recent column, "The beauty of the mosque-cathedral in Cordoba is exceeded only by its power to move even those who, like me, don't practice a particular reli-

gious tradition."

Headlining the conference was a discussion about how the war in Ukraine has impacted religion reporting.

For example, the division between Ukrainian Orthodox and Russian Orthodox Christians has been a major religion story stemming from the war.

At the same time, Ukrainian Christians, Jews and Muslims are experiencing a sense of national unity, the IARJ program said.

For Spanish journalist María-Paz López, there is always a religion story in strife.

"In whatever conflict you cover, there will always be something about religion," said López, who is based in Berlin and reports for La Vanguardia, based in Barcelona. "So you must understand the basics of religion in the area you cover."

Sessions included discussions about the religious landscape or Europe and Spain. European journalists shared stories about the changing religious landscape on the continent, including the impact of the waves of refugees from Africa and Middle East.

Along with traditional Roman Catholicism, Muslims, Jews, Protestants and Buddhists have also

some presence in contemporary Spain.

In the Spanish context, Catholicism remains the country's dominant faith, although secularization in society is high, journalists said.

Many Spanish Catholics label themselves as non-practicing, but still pay taxes to support Catholic institutions.

In another session, journalists shared stories of peaceful coexistence and sharing between different faith communities.

That discussion supported the conference's theme of "Religion Reporting – the Search for Common Ground among Monotheistic Faiths."

Middle Eastern reporters spoke of the difficulties of covering news in a region still divided along religious lines.

Barriers are often present because of laws banning Muslims from visiting Israel or internal norms among some Muslim groups that may shame women who were abused by ISIS captors.

Another session addressed the gender dynamics of reporting. For female journalists, gender remains a barrier to covering faith.

Almost all major faiths are male-dominated, and some female journalists report bias or discrimination in how they are treated or allowed to access sources.

Journalists reporting on conflicts between different religious communities are often caught in crossfires.

They face pressures, and sometimes intimidations or even harassment, from their audience, or from their own faith community if they are religiously affiliated, or from the dominant religion, or from the government, the IARJ program said.

Finding IARJ online

The International Association of Religion Journalists maintains the following web sites and social media accounts:

Facebook

www.facebook.com/TheIARJ

Twitter

@RJournlists

Website

www.theiarj.org/

Grad student & early-scholar spotlights

Meet LaRisa Anderson

She is a doctoral student and Roy H. Park fellow at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, studying in the Hussman School of Media and Journalism.

Her work connects religion to technology and the internet specifically.

Her research has received the Top Paper Award from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication's Religion and Media Interest Group for her work on live stream technology. This paper is under review.

Her department has also recognized the implications of her scholarship with the William Francis Clingman Ethics Award and a Southern Futures Emerging Scholar Award.

This summer her critical analysis of algorithms work, and the study of religion was presented at two international conferences: the International Communication Association in Paris and the Critical Research on Religion Conference in Belfast.

She has also presented her research twice at AEJMC including on a panel on the Black church, gospel music and social activism.

Other research projects she is currently completing include:

- A critical essay on sitcom representations of “the Black church” for an edited collection on *New Perspectives in Black Popular Culture*
- A quantitative project on crisis management in religious organizations
- A co-authored research project on performative gestures in gigachurch services after George Floyd's murder.

Upon completion of her degree, she will pursue an academic career with hopes of teaching interdisciplinary courses in critical digital religious studies, religion and media, digital Black religion and more.



Meet Omar Hammad

He is a recent Ph.D. graduate in the Media Studies area of the School of Communication & Information at Rutgers University.

Hammad's research examines the intersections of Islam, racial identity, gender and civic engagement on social media.

His dissertation, “Digital Islam: The emergence of Muslim counterpublics on social media” explores the hybrid online and

offline lives of U.S. Muslims in New York City and how online spaces facilitate the self-expression and political participation of U.S. Muslims— particularly those who are women, of color and young.

In 2021, he won the Charlotte Newcombe Fellow from the Institute for Citizens and Scholars.

Hammad is also a recipient of the 2020 Jack G. and Bernice M. Shaheen Endowed Media Scholarship for excellence in Media Studies and is a 2020 recipient of an Islamic Scholarship Fund award.

He was a 2020 Fellow at the Muslim Women and Media Training Institute, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation and the University of California at Davis. His dissertation adviser is Regina Marchi.

In 2020, his paper “North American Muslim Satire on YouTube: Combatting or reinforcing stereotypes?” was the first-place student paper from the Religion and Media Interest Group at the AEJMC conference. That same year, the article was published in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Media and Religion*.

In 2021, he joined RMIG's Professional Freedom & Responsibility committee as a member and organized a panel for the 2022 AEJMC conference in Detroit on how the U.S. news media's coverage of Muslims and Islam has evolved since the terror attacks of 9/11.

In August, he became chair of PF&R.



Members prioritize research, engagement, global connections in forward-looking survey

By **Derek Moscato**

Western Washington University

Results from the most recent AEJMC RMIG membership survey show that research and academic impact top the list of member priorities for the future.

The results also highlight the diversity of members' scholarly interests and their engagement within and outside of academia.

An overview of the survey results was presented at the 2022 annual meeting for the Religion and Media Interest Group in the lead-up to the AEJMC annual meeting.

In addition to highlighting the views of longtime and recent members, the survey underscored the commitment of the RMIG community to the interest group's trajectory within AEJMC.

The RMIG survey achieved an impressive 50% participation rate, which is well above average for similar academic associations.

The high feedback rate shows the degree to which RMIG members are engaged, energized, and invested in the academic arena of religion and media. Several key themes emerged from the member survey dataset.

First, RMIG members place a high value on research and traditional scholarship opportunities such as publication. They also place an emphasis on networking with peers and colleagues within RMIG. Finally, they are active within their respective scholarly trajectories and adjoin their RMIG membership to other activities within AEJMC as well as with other scholarly and non-academic organizations.

The latter point is reflected in members belonging to other scholarly journalism and communication associations. In addition to AEJMC, a majority of respondents also belong to either the International Communication Association (ICA),



Derek Moscato serves as research chair for RMIG.

the Broadcast Education Association (BEA), the National Communication Association (NCA), or the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR).

A further 8 percent belong to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). In addition, some members belong to other religious associations such as the American Academy for Religion (AAR), the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, and the Religious Research Association (RRA).

Members' academic interests are also wide-ranging within AEJMC. RMIG members belong to many divisions and interest groups across the association. Leading the way in this regard are the Mass Communication and Society and Media Ethics divisions, followed by divisions serving the areas of Public Relations, International Communication, Minorities and Communication, Magazine Media, and Political Communication. A number of members also belong to the Small Programs Interest Group.

A diversity of religions represented in RMIG scholars' research and teaching underscored the group's global connections and wide outreach to faith-based traditions. Christianity is the focus of scholarship for roughly half of RMIG's members, while Islam is the focus of a further 20%.

Other world religions, including Judaism and Buddhism, accounted for a further 20% of scholars' focus. A smaller number of members (3%) focus on non-secular traditions.

Moving forward, RMIG members

are most excited about opportunities for research and publication within the interest group.

Asked what area was most important as a point of focus for RMIG's future, well over half of surveyed respondents indicated that research/publications was a high or very high priority (65%). A majority of respondents also highlighted the advancement of teaching and pedagogy as a high or very high priority (57%).

Furthermore, RMIG members expressed support for academic and professional networking (43%) along with engagement with religious and media institutions (26 percent) as priority items.

Within the realm of RMIG research opportunities moving forward, members were most interested in the publication of an RMIG-supported research journal, followed by the publication of an RMIG scholarly book and the facilitation of research grants.

The vast majority of respondents indicated they work in university/college teaching roles as professors, lecturers, or instructors. However, some respondents also identified as PhD students or as retirees.

RMIG's legacy of committed and engaged membership was also reflected in the duration of its membership. More than 40% of respondents indicated that they were members for 10 years or longer (the remaining 60% have been members for less than a decade).

The survey was conducted in late 2021, and reflects the vision of a membership that had worked through nearly two years of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information about the RMIG survey, contact RMIG Research Chair Derek Moscato at derek.moscato@wwu.edu