

Alice Hunt to lead AAR as Jack Fitzmier retires

The American Academy of Religion is committed to helping its members face an uncertain field, the leaders said.

by [Rachel Pyle](#) in the [July 4, 2018](#) issue



Alice Hunt and Jack Fitzmier. Photo courtesy of the American Academy of Religion.

Jack Fitzmier is retiring July 1 as executive director of the American Academy of Religion after serving the organization for 12 years. He will hand over duties to Alice Hunt, former president of Chicago Theological Seminary.

During his tenure, Fitzmier has helped guide the organization through many highs and lows, including navigating AAR's separation from the Society of Biblical Literature. The two groups have been closely associated since the 1960s but stopped holding joint ventures in 2008.

"We managed to reconcile the split," Fitzmier said, noting that since 2011 the two groups have held concurrent annual meetings. "That was a lot of work, and a lot of hard feelings were sorted out."

Restructuring the AAR's board helped the organization streamline many of its decision-making processes. During his time at AAR, Fitzmier said the organization faced daunting financial challenges, as well as declining membership.

He added that AAR must continue to wrestle with how to best serve its members facing an uncertain professional field.

"We need to figure out the value of a Ph.D. in religious studies," he said. "If a recent graduate obtains that degree, what can they do with it if they can't have a teaching job?"

AAR's newly adopted mission statement starts to address this issue, he noted.

Hunt echoed Fitzmier's sentiment. "In our current climate, we are more committed than ever to supporting our members, advocating for the humanities and study of religion, and strengthening the public understanding of religion in a way that brings betterment for people and communities everywhere," Hunt said.

Fitzmier said the transition has been going smoothly, noting that he will continue to stay involved with AAR in an advisory role.

"I have enormous confidence in Alice," Fitzmier said, noting that he did not have a hand in selecting Hunt as the new executive director.

"Our time is ripe with opportunities and challenges," she said. "It has never been more important than it is now for the AAR to create spaces for society to benefit

from our greatest resource: our membership that includes more than 8,500 experts in the academic study of religion.” —*Christian Century*

A version of this article appears in the print edition under the title “People: Jack Fitzmier, Alice Hunt.”