Jenny Veninga Selected as 2020 Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leader-of-the-Year

The national board of Theta Alpha Kappa, the National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology, is pleased to announce that Jenny Veninga has been selected to receive the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leader-of-the-Year Award for 2020. Veninga will be recognized at the society’s online Annual Business Meeting on November 8.

The Rev. Dr. Jenny Veninga is an associate professor of religious and theological studies at St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas, where she teaches a range of courses in Christian theology and world religions, including a course in religion, memory, and violence for the Honors Living and Learning Community. Her research and teaching interests include Søren Kierkegaard and existentialism, Scandinavian religion and politics, Islam and the West, trauma and collective memory, and feminist and queer theologies. The author of Secularism, Theology and Islam: The Danish Social Imaginary and the Cartoon Crisis of 2005–2006 (Bloomsbury, 2014), she is currently researching the intersections of theology, trauma studies, and collective memory with a focus on several case studies, including the 2011 tragedy in Norway perpetrated by Anders Behring Breivik and the ongoing conflict in Palestine and Israel. An ordained minister, Dr. Veninga also works with ecumenical and interfaith programs sponsored by St. Edward’s Campus Ministry. She has been the advisor for the Pi chapter of Theta Alpha Kappa since 2012.

Jenny’s involvement in TAK began in the fall of 2011, when, at the kind invitation of colleague Dr. Kelley Coblentz Bautch, she became the comoderator for the Pi Chapter at St. Edward’s University. The following year, she assumed the role of moderator. In that role, she has organized a number of programs and events, including off-campus dinner induction and celebration programs each spring (inducting 49 students since 2012), send-off gatherings for graduating members, graduate school and career information events, and fundraisers. Grateful for the opportunities that TAK offers to students, chapter members have applied for Graduate Fellowship Awards and each year a student is selected for an Undergraduate Achievement Award. Jenny regularly encourages chapter members to submit paper proposals to local and regional conferences, where they frequently present their original research. Since 2016, she has served as the chair of the TAK Section for the Southwest Commission on Religious Studies (AAR/SBL regional conference), which features papers by TAK student members every spring. On the national level, she has served several times as a reader for graduate student paper entries for the Albert Clark Award.

Jessie Guerriero, a senior Catholic Studies major at St. Edward’s University and 2019 TAK inductee, is the 2020 recipient of the Moderator’s Award, presented annually to a student selected by the winner of the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leader-of-the-Year Award.

From Dr. Veninga: “Jessie’s academic engagement in religious and theological studies exemplifies the values of TAK. Last spring, Jessie presented an outstanding paper at the TAK Section for the Southwest Commission on Religious Studies entitled “‘Six for Girls, Seven for Boys’... Examining Feminist Sacramental Theology.” I have the pleasure of serving as advisor for Jessie’s Honors thesis this year, “The Lived Theology of ‘Ave Crux, Spes Unica,’” which examines the history and theology of the Congregation of Holy Cross, the founding order of St. Edward’s University. A recipient of a St. Edward’s Martin Scholarship, Jessie has traveled to Uganda where she worked with Holy Cross clergy and educators; in Austin, she has been an active student leader in Campus Ministry. We are excited to see where Jessie’s graduate school plans take her, and we will miss her after graduation!

From Jessie: “My personal engagement with TAK has encouraged me to continue in my studies and challenged me to think critically. When I presented my paper at the TAK section at SWCRS, it gave me an exciting opportunity to share my own studies, engage with others in conversation about it, and hear from other students about their research. This opportunity also allowed me to further discover how large the community of religious and theological studies is, and how diverse the studies within it are.”