

April 2022
New Series
14.1



Theta Alpha Kappa

The National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology

PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER

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GFA Application Period Now Open

Applications for the **2022 Graduate Fellowship Awards** are now open. The **deadline for all submissions is Sunday, May 22**. TAK inductees who graduate this semester (or completed their undergraduate degree within the last three years) are eligible to apply for awards for their first year of graduate study. The society will award up to **three fellowships** (with values of \$3000, \$2000, or \$1000). See more information at <https://thetalpha.org/graduate-fellowship-competition/>.

Bystrom, Hom, and Contarero Win 2022 Clark Awards



Theta Alpha Kappa is delighted to announce the winners of the 2022 Albert Clark Awards at the undergraduate and graduate levels. **Jason Bystrom** (California State University, Chico; left) took first place in the undergraduate category for his essay "A Cross to Bear: On the Persistence of Crucifixion Imagery in Modern Jewish Art." Second place went to **Nicholas Hom** (Elon University; right) for "Gods, Gurus, and Ghouls: Jain and Hindu Bhakti in Medieval Tamil Literature." The winner in the graduate student category was **Jonathan Contarero** (Evangel University; center) for his paper "Acts 16:16–40 as a Framework for Prison Theology." The three winning papers, along with several others submitted for the competition, will be **published in future issues of *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa***, which will shift to a **new online format in Fall 2022**.

Special thanks go to **Bernadette McNary-Zak**, who coordinated the 2022 competition (and those of the previous four years) as editor of *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa*, and to the **faculty judges** who evaluated the numerous applications: **Matthew Eaton** (King's College), **William Rodriguez** (Bethune-Cookman University), **Seth Schermerhorn** (Hamilton College), **Ken Stenstrup** (St. Mary's University of Minnesota), **Ellen Umansky** (Fairfield University), and **Clodagh Weldon** (Dominican University).

Alternate Induction Method Now a Permanent Option

TAK introduced a temporary alternate induction method during the COVID-19 pandemic that allowed authorized students to place their own induction orders directly from our vendor. **This proved helpful for many chapters during the pandemic and also for those at online and/or multicampus institutions.** Now this policy—updated with expanded mailing and printing options—has been made permanent. **Please note, however, that the traditional method by which the chapter representative places one order on behalf of all new inductees remains the *standard and preferred ordering procedure*.** Please see the full policy (with detailed instructions to be conveyed to students) at <https://thetalpha.org/alternate-induction-method/>.

Welcome to two new TAK chapters: Tabor College (Hillsboro, KS; chapter representative Rick Bartlett) and Birmingham-Southern College (Birmingham, AL; chapter representative Amy Cottrill).

TAK Plans In-Person Business Meeting/Reception in November 2022

After two years of online business meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TAK plans to resume hosting its traditional business meeting and reception in conjunction with the joint Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature this fall. The event is tentatively planned for the evening of Sunday, November 20, in Denver, CO. Watch for additional details in the Fall 2022 President's Newsletter.

Important Reminder about Annual Chapter Dues

Please remember that **all** chapters are obligated to pay annual chapter dues each year. **This is the case regardless of whether the chapter expects to induct new members in a particular year.** Please pay chapter dues in the fall semester, upon receipt of the invoice from the TAK treasurer Michael Berger.

UAA Deadline Approaching

Local TAK chapters whose code number ends in the digits 0–4 may select one student to honor with the **Undergraduate Achievement Award** for the 2021–2022 academic year. **The deadline to request an award is June 30, 2022.** The award is available to each local chapter every other academic year to promote excellence among undergraduate students, and each recipient receives a check for \$100 from the national society. Chapter representatives may confirm their chapter numbers in the chapter directory on the TAK website, and they may designate the student recipient for the prize by emailing (from their institutional email account) TAK treasurer Michael Berger (michael.berger@emory.edu).

Website Revisions Continue

As noted in the previous President's Newsletter, significant revisions of the TAK website (ThetaAlphaKappa.org) are underway. As an interim measure, a new FAQs section with updated information for commonly asked questions (including for topics like induction criteria, fees, award programs, and membership status) has been added to the main page (scroll down to view), with links to additional discussion of relevant topics elsewhere on the present website. The board's policies and procedures manual has also been updated, while work continues on adaptations to the chapter handbook. Additional, more substantive website revisions are also in process and will be implemented in the coming months. **We welcome suggestions for other revisions you might find useful.**

Congratulations for the upcoming retirements of **C. David Grant**, former national president of TAK and chapter representative at Texas Christian University, **Ellen Umansky**, former board member and chapter representative at Fairfield University, and **Edward Zukowski** of College of Mount Saint Vincent, who devoted an astounding 34 years of service to his chapter!

Nominations Invited for KCW Award and Service Opportunities

The **Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award** is given annually to a current or former chapter representative or TAK board member in recognition of outstanding service to the society or its goals. The honoree is selected by the national board and nominated by the board's Awards and Recognitions Committee. If you know of a chapter representative doing exceptional work with his or her chapter, please let the committee know by sending the representative's name, institution, and a description of the person's achievements to theta_alpha_kappa_inquiries@ThetaAlphaKappa.org. **Opportunities for service** to the society are also available, including board membership and judging papers submitted for the Albert Clark Award. If you would like more information about either of these positions, for yourself or to recommend someone else, please inquire at the same email address.

Two New Members Elected to Board

Society members approved at the 2021 online business meeting the slate of nominees for open board positions that was circulated in the Fall 2021 President's Newsletter. Among those elected are two new members who will join the board as at-large members on July 1, 2022.



L.D. Russell (left) is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at Elon University, Elon, NC. He specializes in the areas of world religions and religion and culture (including aspects of religion in auto racing and popular music). In 2018 he received TAK's Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award.

Robert (Rob) Seesengood (right) is Professor of Religious Studies and Associate Dean at Albright College in Reading, PA. His research and publishing interests include Paul and the Pauline epistles, the Apocalypse of John, athletics in the ancient world, and reception of the Bible in contemporary popular culture.