Spring/Fall
2023
New Series
15.1–2

Theta Alpha Kappa

The National Honor Society for Religious Studies and Theology

PRESIDENT'S NEWSLETTER

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2023 TAK Business Meeting Online November 8 with Constitutional Changes on the Agenda

Please mark your calendar to participate in the online **2023 TAK Business Meeting** on Wednesday, November 8, at 8–9 p.m. Central time. The Zoom link was included in the email message through which chapter representatives received this newsletter. The meeting is scheduled for a weekday evening rather than a weekend in response to results of the chapter representative survey in Spring 2023. The time was selected by the board with hopes that participation will be feasible for chapter representatives in all four time zones of the continental United States.

This year's business meeting is especially important because several **constitutional changes** are on the agenda. Information about these changes was originally distributed to chapter representatives by email on October 5. Most of the matters concern details of board offices, including changing the *JTAK* editor's position from an appointed to an elected office, revising the nature of the *JTAK* associate editor's position, and retaining the immediate past president on the board for a year in an *ex officio* capacity.

The much more significant issue for local chapters is the **revision of the undergraduate induction eligibility criteria concerning class rank and overall GPA**. Presently our constitution requires (in accordance with past policies of the Association of College Honor Societies, or ACHS) a 3.0 GPA overall (on a four-point scale) and a class rank in the top 35%. Many chapter representatives for TAK and other honor societies now find it very difficult to get class rank information from their registrars, however, so ACHS established a new policy in early 2023 to allow member societies like TAK to delete the class rank component if they increase the overall GPA requirement to 3.3. The TAK national board heartily affirms such a change to address this long-standing issue, and it now brings the matter to the broader membership for formal approval as a constitutional change. Note that induction of graduate students is not affected.

In addition to the constitutional changes, the meeting agenda will include reports from committee chairs and officers from the national board, and **Ken Stenstrup** will be honored as the 2023 recipient of the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award. Also, and we will vote on the nomination of **Isabel (Bella) Mukonyora** (Western Kentucky University) for election to an At Large board position (2024–2027).

We look forward to seeing everyone at the Zoom meeting. Please send any questions about the meeting to theta_alpha_kappa_inquiries@ThetaAlphaKappa.org.

Chapter Representatives Dinner in San Antonio

Thanks to everyone who responded to the invitation to the TAK dinner for chapter representatives in San Antonio during the weekend of the AAR-SBL Annual Meeting. We look forward to that time of conversation in the midst of the busy conference schedule. Thanks especially to board member Christopher McMahon for organizing the event.

Next Issue of *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa* Coming Soon

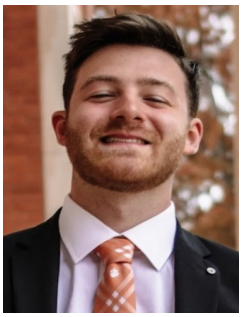
Please bookmark jtak.scholasticahq.com in your browser and spread the word to your current students and past inductees that *JTAK* is now freely available onine.

Welcome *to the new TAK chapters at* ***Leavell College*** *in Louisiana (chapter representative Thomas G. Doughty Jr.),* ***St. Joseph's College*** *in Maine (chapter representative Steven L. Bridge),* ***Butler University*** *in Indiana (chapter representative Brent Hege), and* ***Arkansas Baptist College*** *(chapter representative Marshawn C. Wilbourn).*

2024 Albert Clark Awards Competition Open—Judges Needed

The TAK board is pleased to announce that the application period for the **2024 Albert Clark Awards** essay competition for undergraduate and graduate students is now open. Winning essays in each category will be honored with a cash prize and publication in a future issue of *JTAK*. Please see the competition guidelines and submission date information at the TAK website (https://thetaalphakappa.org/clark-awards/). Please contact Andrea Stanton (andrea.stanton@du.edu) to **volunteer as a judge**.

Winners Selected for 2023 Albert Clark Awards and 2023 Graduate Fellowships



Five students were selected as winners of the **2023 Albert Clark Awards** and are pictured above in the following order. **Kimberly Fromkin** (Harvard University, Extension School) took first place in the graduate student category. Earlier she was the recipient of a 2022 Graduate Fellowship Award. Two students were honored for second place in the Clark Awards graduate category, **Spencer Danley** (Emory University) and **Kayla Ray** (Loyola Marymount University). In the Clark Awards undergraduate category, **Madelyn Starr** (Elon University) was the first place winner, followed by **Dung Tran** (University of Pennsylvania). The articles by all five winners will appear in future issues of the *Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa*.

Three students were awarded **Graduate Fellowship Awards** for the 2023–2024 academic year and are pictured below. The first place fellowship was awarded to **Lucianna Onderwyzer Gold**. Lucy was inducted into TAK as an undergraduate Religious Studies major at Pomona College (in the Claremont Colleges chapter) and now is pursuing her Ph.D. in Religion and Critical Thought at Brown University. **Ciara Mulcahy**, our second-place GFA winner, was inducted into TAK as an undergraduate at Kenyon College, where she double-majored in Religious Studies and Classics. She now studies early Christianity in the Ancient Mediterranean Religion track at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. **Calista Alejandra Robledo** was the recipient of the third GFA prize. Inducted into TAK at St. Edward's University, where she double-majored in Catholic Studies and Writing and Rhetoric (with a concentration in Creative Writing), she is now enrolled in the M.Div. program at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry.

Undergraduate Achievement Awards Available

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 2023–2024 academic year. **The deadline to request an award is June 30, 2024.** 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).

Ken Stenstrup Selected for 2023 Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award

THE NATIONAL BOARD OF THETA ALPHA KAPPA is pleased to announce that **KEN STENSTRUP** is the 2023 recipient of the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award. He will be honored at the society's Annual Business Meeting on Wednesday, November 8 (online).

Dr. Stenstrup joined the Theology faculty at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota in Winona, Minnesota, in 2001 after teaching religion in high schools the previous decade. He received his B.A. in Theology from Creighton University, an M.A. in Theological Studies from Claremont School of Theology, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Old Testament from Claremont Graduate University. His dissertation examined Jewish and Christian portrayals of King Manasseh. He is the author of *Titus: Honoring the Gospel of God* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010) and several journal articles, and he specializes in reception history and social-scientific criticism. He served five years as chair of the Department of Theology at Saint Mary's.

"My interest in Theology began at the diocesan seminary in Milwaukee," Stenstrup recalls. "When I transferred to Creighton University, I found those interests expanded and developed in ways I had never imagined. There, courses with Bruce J. Malina and Michael Lawler were especially appreciated. With their encouragement and support I was accepted at the Claremont Graduate University (formerly Claremont Graduate School), where the graduate cohort and instructors Burton Mack, Rolf Knierim, and especially James A. Sanders were added blessings to an already thoroughly appreciated education. Over the past twenty-two years, their insights and especially pedagogy have continued with me in the classrooms of Saint Mary's University."

Stenstrup has taught a wide range of courses and notes that "the most enjoyable classes have been those filled with people willing to engage the material. A vast majority of the *over four thousand* students that have shared a classroom with me were filling 'General Education' or 'Priest Formation' requirements. Yet within these requirements some groups really took on the material with interesting questions and insights. And looking back, I appreciate those classes the most."

Likewise, Stenstrup has been deeply involved in the work of Theta Alpha Kappa, as a volunteer judge for papers submitted for the national Albert Clark Awards but especially as chapter representative at Saint Mary's from 2003 until 2021. He finds special significance in the fact that Saint Mary's, a Catholic university founded by the Christian Brothers, shares that tradition with Brother Albert Clark, who played a key role in the founding of the honor society at Manhattan College in New York in 1976. He values very much the way the TAK chapter at Saint Mary's has served to affirm the importance of academic study of religion alongside the major emphasis on service at his university.

TIM KUJAWA, a seminarian in his sophomore year at Saint Mary's University, is the 2023 recipient of the **KCW Student Award**, which is presented annually to a student selected by the winner of the Kathleen Connolly-Weinert Leadership Award.

Kujawa especially impressed Stenstrup with his interest in biblical exegesis in a year-long introductory Scripture course: "As a not so traditional student, Tim quickly became a model within and beyond the classroom" due to "his willingness to work through the material and his ability to ask important questions about what he had read."

Kujawa cites work on the Gospel of Mark ("where I learned that no word is wasted") and Paul's Epistle to Philemon as experiences that fueled this passion. He hopes to do additional work on Philemon and is "excited to learn more from the greater TAK community."