

The Conferences on Media, Religion, and Culture FAQ

Secretariat of the Conferences on Media, Religion, and Culture
Boulder, CO, USA

Conference Title: Each conference is titled by its number in the series: The Sigtuna meeting in 2006 was “The Fifth International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture,” the Sao Paulo meeting was “The Sixth International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture,” and so on. If individual Conference organizers wish to use a specific overall title or theme, then that theme should be followed by the designation “The ____th International Conference on Media, Religion, and Culture.”

Conference Series: Beginning with Louisville, conferences are scheduled each second year in even numbered years. The previous conferences and their locations were: Uppsala, Sweden, 1993; Boulder, Colorado, USA, 1996; Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, 1999; Louisville, Kentucky, USA, 2004; Sigtuna, Sweden, 2006; Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2008; Toronto, Canada, 2010. In addition, the Sacred Media Conference held in Jyvaskyla, Finland, in 2003 played an important role, even though it was not formally one of the CMRCs.

Upcoming Conferences: The conferences currently planned for coming years are: Eskesir, Turkey 2012 (contact person: Nezih Orhon); Canterbury, UK 2014 directed by Gordon Lynch, and Seoul, Korea 2016, directed by Jin Kyu Park and Sunny Yoon. The 2018 meeting is tentatively planned for Los Angeles, USA.

Conference Oversight: A formal membership organization called "The International Society for Media, Religion, and Culture" was formed in 2011 to hold the conferences. The conferences will subsequently be overseen by the Society's board of directors. Founding members of this body (and the conferences they were themselves responsible for) are: Alf Linderman (Uppsala and Sigtuna); Stewart M. Hoover (Boulder); Lynn Schofield Clark (Boulder); Jolyon Mitchell (Edinburgh); John Ferre (Louisville); Johanna Sumiala-Seppanen (Jyvaskyla); Mia Loveheim (Sigtuna); Magali do Nascimento Cunha (Sao Paulo); and Joyce Smith (Toronto). Stewart Hoover currently acts as chair and founding President of the Society. The primary responsibilities of the Board are: 1) selection of sites, directors, and sponsoring organizations for future conferences; 2) evaluation and oversight of the series, and 3) assistance to individual directors and sponsoring groups as needed.

Relationship between the Society and the Conferences: These matters are currently under discussion. For the Eskisehir and Canterbury meetings, it is anticipated that the Society and its Board will collaborate with conference directors through its ex officio "conference venue coordinator," typically the Vice President-elect of the Board. Society memberships are for a two-year period, from conference and to conference. Membership fees for the Society are collected along with conference registrations and entitle participants to a "scientific membership" in the Society. The dues rate as of this writing is \$25.

Conference Secretariat: Certain ongoing activities of the conference series and the Steering Committee are housed at the Center for Media, Religion, and Culture, University of Colorado, Boulder, USA. These include maintenance of grant monies received, a website with links to

individual conference websites, a mailing list of conference participants, and other such files and records. Individual conference organizers should develop and maintain their own websites for their individual conferences to which the Secretariat's and the other conference's websites can be linked.

Planning of individual conferences: Each conference is planned by its director or directors and sponsoring organizations. The Society's board stands ready to help in any way it can and to offer advice, contacts, and to help in locating resources during the planning process. This FAQ includes some general guidelines for directors and organizers as they proceed with the planning process.

Budgets: In general, Conference Directors have funded the conferences through a combination of local sources (such as University or national conference support funds), other grants, income from registration fees, and income from private or commercial sponsors. Registration fees have been the most important source of income for most of these conferences. Commercial sponsors have been interested in supporting conference breaks, refreshments or meal events. The Board stands ready to assist with advice about budgets based on its experience.

The Conference Director: For each conference, the Board requires that there be a single director who is primarily responsible for conference planning and for overseeing the actual conference. The Board strongly encourages Directors to assemble an advisory or arrangements committee to assist in planning and other matters. Most Directors have also named an Assistant or Associate Director to participate in this planning, but the Board feels strongly that it must have one individual to whom it can direct inquiries and with whom it works. The Director assumes responsibility for planning the conference, including 1) organization of the conference program; 2) the conference schedule; 3) developing and overseeing the process whereby papers, panelists, and other program elements are selected; 4) developing a funding plan that will ensure the conference's success; 5) ensuring that arrangements for the conference's proceedings and for the housing and physical needs of conference participants are carried out in an appropriate manner.

Conference publication: Individual conference directors are free to make whatever arrangements they see fit for publication of conference proceedings. There is no requirement or expectation in this regard. Some conference directors have chosen not to plan for publication of proceedings, others have produced edited volumes based on conference papers and presentations.

Conference language: The primary conference language is English and plenaries should generally be conducted in English. The dominant second language of most participants has been Spanish. Thus, provision should be made for translation between English and Spanish and into other languages as dictated by the particular conference venue and participation.

Conference length: The CMRCs have generally crossed four days, with an opening afternoon of panels followed by a formal plenary and opening, with appropriate social activities, the first evening. Two full days of panels and plenaries follow, with the conference concluding on the fourth day either at mid-day or later. Individual directors and venues are free to determine which particular days of the week (mid-week or weekend) are most appropriate. Some thought should be given to implications for travel to the venue in making these decisions.

Venue and Facilities: The conference venue should be one that is able to offer appropriate facilities for the housing and other physical needs of participants as well as the efficient presentation of program elements. If possible, a range of housing options is best, with a mix of inexpensive accommodation (such as on a University campus) for students and others of limited means and more traditional hotel-style accommodation for those requiring such. Past conferences have taken place at conference centres, at University facilities, and at conference hotels. If at all possible, housing and conference venues should be convenient to one another, preferably within walking distance.

Conference venues should be reasonably convenient to international air transportation, and transport from the nearest airport to the venue should also be convenient, efficient, and inexpensive.

Meals: In general, it is not expected that meals be provided at academic meetings. However, at some venues, this is the only option, due to location or other factors. Food is typically provided at some kinds of conference events, such as receptions. This provides some benefit to conferees who are attending on tight budgets. Whether or not to provide meals as part of the conference package is a matter at the discretion of individual conference directors. However, due to the fact that this varies from conference to conference, it is advisable that conference materials make it clear whether meals will be included in the conference fee.

Conference Dates: The exact dates of individual conferences are left to the discretion of individual conference directors. Three CMRCs and the Jyvaskyla meeting took place in the northern Summer, but two CMRCs were at other times of the year. In general, the Northern Summer months (June-August) seem to be preferable. Conferences should be separated by about two years, meaning that subsequent meetings could take place anywhere from 18-30 months after the previous meeting, though no more than 24 months is preferred, and longer gaps will create problems for subsequent meetings.

Conference program and schedule: The CMRC is primarily an academic meeting, and the core of the event should be composed of panels and other presentations of academic and scholarly work. Conference directors should strive to make the selection process as open and interdisciplinary as possible. For example, a conference theme should not be determinative to the extent that quality work in other areas is rejected. The CMRC should continue to encourage participation by a the diverse array of interests that make up its global “community.” Calls for papers should thus be as open as possible. For examples of how conferences are able to maintain themes and be open to a range of materials, directors might consult the websites of the International Communication Association, the American Academy of Religion, and the International Association for the History of Religions.

The conference should thus include a mix of plenary sessions and panel sessions composed of papers submitted and selected according to merit. It is good to have “air” (or free time) in the schedule so that participants can meet one another, network, and otherwise talk and collaborate. The venue should also encourage and allow such interchange. Thus, it is important that the conference not be over-programmed. In general, the conference can include evening sessions, but past conferences have limited such in order to also allow an outing or other activity one of the evenings, or allow a “free” evening to participants. Paper and panel sessions should be at

least 75 minutes in length and include three papers (or four, maximum). Paper and panel sessions should include a chair to oversee the session and a respondent (at the discretion of the organizers). Chairs and respondents are typically named by the Conference Director or planners. Paper and panel sessions run concurrently. At past conferences, there have been two or three concurrent sessions. These numbers depend a bit on the numbers of papers accepted for presentation, but it should be kept in mind that fewer sessions do serve to increase the numbers in attendance at individual sessions.

If possible, an “outing” should be planned that puts conference participants in touch with the local culture or other resources. These have ranged from more “educational” to more “recreational” at past conferences, and have generally taken place on one of the evenings. At the discretion of the Conference Director, a conference dinner or banquet may also be planned for the last evening of the conference. This need not include a formal program. Such meal events might incur an additional fee for participants.

Conference registration fees: These have varied greatly from conference to conference, and depend on whether costs for meals and housing are to be included. In general, though, it is best to be able to offer a reduced fee to students and—if possible—attendees from the Global South. Some resources should also be found if possible to allow travel assistance for students and scholars who otherwise might not be able to attend. The registration fee should include the scientific membership in the ISMRC.

Paper/presentation selection and criteria: The CMRC conferences are primarily academic meetings, but past conference have included input and material from non-academic and professional participants. To ensure the continued development of the field of media and religion, academic papers should be selected for their scholarly merit on the basis of a submitted proposal or draft paper. Directors should develop a process for evaluating these proposals. Non-academic presentations should be selected for their substance in relation to issues and questions of interest to participants, and/or relevance to themes or issues being addressed in an individual conference. The general criteria for all papers and presentations should be: 1) their relevance to the theme of a given conference; 2) their analysis of media; 3) their analysis of religion, and; 4) their integration of theory or method in media *and* religion.

Local Conference Secretariat: If possible, arrangements should be made for the conference secretariat to be open continually to deal with questions, problems, and unforeseen circumstances. Previous Directors have ensured this with volunteer and student labor.

Interest groups: Past conferences have made arrangements for interest groups to form and meet. This might involve setting aside lunchtimes for such meetings, or other ways that attendees who share common interests might meet. A sign-up process early in the conference is the best approach.

Other meetings: At previous conferences, other groups, seminars, or organizations have also arranged to meet either before or after the main CMRC event. If possible, conference planners should make efforts to cooperate with such groups and offer advice and assistance as to facilities, etc. Holding the CMRC in conjunction with other formal conferences and meetings might also

make sense in certain circumstances. However, efforts should be made to keep the CMRC distinct so as to encourage participation and networking.

Diversity: The CMRC conferences are international events and efforts should be made to ensure that they are both international and inter-religious. Panels and plenary sessions should, if at all possible, represent national, ethnic, religious, gender, and other diversity, and should encourage, where possible, younger scholars and graduate students.

Other program/conference elements: Previous conferences have made special efforts to contact graduate students in attendance and to put them in touch with one another and with resources. It has been suggested that a special pre-conference for graduate students might be planned at future conferences. Previous conferences have also made efforts to include *media* or *media presentations* as part of the conference mix.

Book display: Where possible, publishers should be encouraged to attend and to display appropriate titles. Often, they can be charged for the costs of such display. In addition, provision should be made for a conference book display, with participants bringing single copies of relevant books for others to peruse. If arrangements can be made for purchase of these, this is an added benefit to participants who often find it difficult to locate appropriate books in their home contexts.

Planning schedule: It is imperative that conference organization, paper and panel submissions, and other plans be made in a timely manner. Therefore the following guideline schedule is suggested. These move backward from the actual dates of the conference once they have been finalized.

Minus 24 months: Conference Director named by the ISMRC Board.

Minus 22 months: Conference dates and venue in process, Conference Director names other local committee members and an Associate Director.

Minus 18 months: Final conference dates, venue (and theme, where appropriate) announced, with the announcement placed on the Boulder website and circulated to past conference participants. Preferred: conference website also established with information about schedules, dates, of other deadlines.

Minus 12 months: A Call for Papers and proposals (CFP) is circulated, detailing conference theme, deadlines, and procedure for submitting paper and panel proposals. In general, the deadline should be six months later. Invitations to plenary speakers and other major presenters should be sent by this time (where appropriate).

Minus 6 months: Deadline for paper, presentation, and panel proposals. Conference website should have registration details and materials posted, and should be open for conference and housing registrations.

Minus 5 months: Selected papers, presentations, and panels should be notified and asked for confirmation of their attendance.

Minus 3 months: Conference program should be finalized and posted on the conference and Boulder websites.

Minus 1 month: Final conference program should be released to web, and deadline for participants to submit final versions of papers and presentations.

For further information:

Stewart M. Hoover
President

The International Society for Media, Religion, and Culture
The Center for Media, Religion and Culture
University of Colorado
Campus Box 478
1511 University Avenue
Boulder, CO 80309-0478 USA

Center Ph: (Int+1) 303-492-1357
Center Fx: (Int+1) 303-492-0969
Office Ph: (Int+1) 303-492-4833
email: hoover@colorado.edu

Original document prepared by Steering Committee Meeting, Sigtuna, Sweden, 9 July, 2006: ver. 4.1