One of the invigorating streams of thought in the psychology of religion and spirituality in recent years has been fueled by positive psychology, and specifically, the study of character strengths or virtues. In this, my first presidential column, I’d like to focus on one particular virtue: gratitude. This has not been one of the “hot” character strengths studied in our division, but is an important one to consider at this particular point in our divisional history. So my question is, what would it look like to be generous as a division? What would it look like to give the psychology of religion and spirituality away? What would it look like to be open-handed with the wealth of knowledge and insight that we have about our field?

This question comes in the context of a particular historical force molding the development of our division, characterized by widespread apathy or hostility on the part of the larger psychological community toward religion. Many influential giants in psychology’s history, such as Freud, Skinner, and Rogers, had little use for religion. Edward Shafranske’s surveys of the religiosity of psychologists repeatedly showed a large gap between psychologists and the general population, with psychologists overwhelmingly reporting less religiosity and belief in a personal God (Shafranske, 2001).

The consequent marginalization of the psychological study of religion and spirituality has been a focus of division leadership since the early days of the division. We fought to be accepted as a division and to be accepted as a legitimate area of psychological study (Reuder, 1999). Advocacy on the part of divisional leadership led to successes. In 1986 president Richard Gorsuch was invited to write a chapter on the psychology of religion for the *Annual Review of Psychology*. Ralph Hood, who succeeded him, furthered the efforts to get the variable of religion into textbooks of psychology. However, the tide was shifting, and a sea change was coming. Influenced by a greater cultural acceptance of spirituality and by the solid research of our members, religion and spirituality were being perceived in more positive ways. The watershed
moment was, perhaps, when Ed Shafranske’s just-released book, *Religion and the Clinical Practice of Psychology* was the best-seller at the 1996 APA annual convention. It became clear that former antagonisms were waning.

But the molding influence of our history had left its mark on our division. We had become accustomed to a certain posture: a defensive one, in which we responded to marginalization by minding our own business and turning our efforts inward. If psychology didn’t want us, we weren’t sure we wanted them either! We did things by ourselves, for ourselves. And this posture became reified through our habitual ways of doing things.

It’s time to unlearn that posture. While we may still face pockets of indifference or hostility, there are also many open doors, and I hope we take the initiative to step through them. In fact, this is part of our newly-adopted mission statement, which says in part, that the division “seeks through its activities to increase public awareness of psychological dimensions of religion and spirituality.” So it’s time to unlearn old habits, to re-examine the structures within our division that have reified those habits, and to learn to connect more fully with our discipline.

My presidential initiatives have to do with providing scaffolding for movements within our division and the larger APA to support giving the psychology of religion and spirituality away. And let me say here that if any of these initiatives spark your interest, please let me know and I will be happy to help you get involved.

### Maximizing our Presence at the 2014 Convention

You may have heard rumblings that a major change is occurring beginning at next year’s annual convention. While I think the changes represent an improvement to the overall convention experience, they will also mean a drastic reduction in the hours allotted solely to our division. But there will be many hours allotted to cross-divisional programming — which means that we need to intentionally collaborate with other divisions to keep our division represented well at the convention. To this end, I’ve established a Task Force for the transition to the new convention format, comprised of Innocent Okozi, David Wang, Kevin Ladd, and myself — all of us with experience as program chairs and/or hospitality suite coordinators. We have been working diligently to raise awareness of the new cross-divisional programming and to make connections with other divisions around topics of common interest.

If your research is relevant to at least one other division, please consider submitting a cross-divisional program. If your submission is not accepted for cross-divisional hours, it will still be eligible for our own division’s programming — so you lose nothing by submitting, and potentially gain a wider audience for your work. Please note the November 1st deadline for submissions. Further information can be found online at [http://www.apacommunities.org/docs/DOC-3604](http://www.apacommunities.org/docs/DOC-3604).

### Continuing our International Collaboration

In recent years a number of opportunities have surfaced to collaborate with researchers in the psychology of religion from other countries. In response to this, Julie Exline established a task force to explore ways of effectively initiating and maintaining these contacts. The resulting International Relations Committee, co-chaired by Kevin Ladd...
and Chris Boyatzis, has made a lot of headway in the past month, recruiting members, deciding on a vision and mission statement, and proposing a number of goals and initiatives. If you have an interest in the intersection of religion and culture or in world religions that are not well represented in our US context, you may be interested in becoming involved in one of their initiatives.

Collaborating with the APA Ethics Office

We have been approached by representatives of the APA Ethics Office who are interested in how our expertise can be utilized by the larger APA to inform professional ethics. After a couple of meetings, we’re not quite sure what this collaboration will look like, but it may involve the formation of an ad hoc committee of psychology of religion consultants available when religious issues emerge, or a synthesis of available sources on ethics in working with religiously-committed populations. We will be co-hosting an event with the APA Ethics Office at next year’s annual convention in Washington, D.C. If you have expertise in the intersection of religion and ethics, please let me know!

Reaching out Geographically

We have more members on the East Coast than in other areas of the country, and some of this may have to do with the fact that our very successful midwinter meeting has been held on Loyola’s campus in Baltimore for the past 11 years. We are very grateful for the support of Loyola and the work of Ralph Piedmont during this time, but it’s time now to expand our horizons. So the 2014 midwinter meeting will be held April 25–26 in sunny Southern California, hosted by my own institution, Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University. This new location will allow for active involvement and member recruitment in the institutions on the west coast. Our hope is to develop a rotating schedule, so that members from all parts of the country can easily attend this event. Plan on spending a few days here, and bring the family! We’re within a half hour of Disneyland, the beach, Hollywood, and several other southern California destinations.

Collaborating with Other Key Divisions

At the 2013 annual convention in Honolulu, we collaborated with Division 44 (Society for the Psychological Study of LGBT Issues) to host “twin” conversation hours in each of our hospitality suites. The topic of conversation was potential collaborations between our divisions. As a result of that very productive discussion, I have established a task force on LGBT issues that will collaborate with Division 44’s task force on religion and spirituality on a number of initiatives. Mark Yarhouse has agreed to chair this new task force, which will explore joint projects such as applying for CODAPAR grants, conference presentations, developing resources, etc. This may form a model for collaboration with other divisions in the future. If you see the need for more intentional collaboration with other divisions and would like to be involved, let me know!

As I look around at the larger field of psychology, I see many places where our expertise is needed (whether they know it or not!). On the research side, we know the best ways of understanding and measuring religious variables, and have accumulated mountains of research on the relationships between religion/spirituality and other variables.
On the clinical side, we have a wealth of clinical experience and research demonstrating the importance of including spirituality in the care we give to clients. Perhaps we can do a better job of giving our wealth away, enriching our field and ourselves in the process.

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MEANINGFUL COPING
MEANINGFUL COPING WITH ADVERSITY IN WESTERN-EUROPE
JESSIE DE ZUTTER, PH.D.

Experiencing meaning in life is acknowledged as an important aspect for optimal psychological functioning (e.g., Steger, 2012). However, the confrontation with stressful situations shatters the sense of meaning of individuals what can create feelings of loss of control and loss of predictability, leading to the experience of intense stress (Park, 2008). Coping with severe life stressors such as trauma, bereavement or medical stressors will thus involve trying to re-establish meaning in one’s life as well as trying to find meaning in the stressful life event. How do people cope meaningfully in a changing West-European society where institutional and established religion seems to disappear out of the public domain? That is the core focus of my research.

Meaning system approach
In the past, religion often seemed to be an obvious resource to turn to in times of sorrow, worries, and pain. Saying a prayer, burning a candle, or making a pilgrimage were part of the range of coping resources one could appeal on when confronted with life stressors. With the rise of medical science and the start of secularization in most West-European countries, religion as a coping tool seemed to have disappeared from the public domain. However, recent research (e.g., Büssing, et al., 2009) shows that aspects of religion and spirituality are still important in coping with severe life stressors such as trauma, loss, and chronic illness. However, these factors are less overtly visible and more secluded in the private realm. This conclusion fits with the observation in the sociology of religion that in more secularized and postmodern areas, such as Western European countries, the impact of institutionalized religion has been steadily waning and organizational dimensions of religion have decreased in importance over time (Becker, & de Hart, 2006).
example, in Belgium, church attendance and denominational affiliation are very low and the majority of the population are not active members of any religious tradition (Botterman, Hooghe, & Bekkers, 2009). Despite this resistance toward church affiliation and active involvement, most individuals still believe in a transcendent reality and the presence of a divine being, and they adhere to a more personal transcendent faith, not necessarily rooted in one specific religious tradition or denomination (Jagodziński & Dobbelæere, 1995). Davie (2005) has further observed that religious beliefs have become increasingly personal, detached, and heterogeneous, resulting in a phenomenon of “believing without belonging” for many West European individuals. This ‘believing without belonging’ attitude seems to spread in secularized and postmodern societies, where individuals may have turned away from culturally prescribed religious content but may, nonetheless, continue to value their personal constructs of beliefs and faith.

For studying meaningful coping in West-Europe, simple inquiries of denominational affiliation or church involvement is no longer adequate. A new and promising approach, especially suitable for postmodern and secularized countries, is the meaning systems perspective (e.g., Park, 2005; Silberman, 2005). A meaning system is the framework through which the individual views the world and his- or herself. Based on this orienting system, he or she interprets and evaluates experiences and encounters. Park (2005) described a system of global meaning, which includes global beliefs (cognitive aspect), global goals (motivational aspect) and a subjective sense of meaning or purpose (affective aspect). The content of this meaning system can be transcendent (with reference to a sacred core) or secular (without reference to a sacred core) and is suitable for the personal, heterogeneous and detached faith ideas of West-European participants. The approach is ideal to conduct research in secularized and pluralistic countries such as Belgium.

However, not only the content of the meaning system is important, but also the centrality (Huber, 2003). Indeed, the meaning system, both transcendent and immanent/secular, does not hold the same central place in every person’s personality and we can assume that the impact of the meaning system on an individual’s experience and behaviour is dependent on the centrality of this system. In a study with chronic pain patients (Dezutter et al., 2010), we indeed found that the centrality of the meaning system plays a role in coping with pain.

Processes

Instead of focusing solely on the relationship between a meaning system and psychological functioning/health, my interest lays predominantly in the underlying processes. The guiding theoretical framework herein, is the meaning making model of Crystal Park (e.g., Park, 2010 for an overview) complemented with ideas from positive psychology on meaning in life (e.g., Steger, 2012) and concepts from cognitive-emotional process theory (Gross, 2003). In two recent studies, meaning in life turned out to be an important, but complex, predictor of well-being, both for healthy adolescents (Dezutter et al., 2013) as well as for chronic ill adults (Dezutter et al., in press). Other studies focused on specific aspects of meaning systems and specific meaning making processes. In collaboration with the Flemish Pain League and together with colleagues from the Netherlands (Dr. Schaap-Jonker) and Germany (Dr. Büssing), we explored the role of God images for chronic pain patients. Results showed that God images were related with happiness in...
chronic pain patients and this association was mediated by positive disease interpretation (an operationalization of cognitive re-appraisal; Dezutter et al., 2010). In line with the previous study and in collaboration with Dr. Wachholtz (UMass), a second study was set up to investigate whether prayer can function as a re-appraisal technique. Results seemed to indicate that prayer indeed has re-appraising capacities, especially for religious pain patients (Dezutter, Wachholtz, & Corveleyn, 2011).

Currently, a new longitudinal study on this topic has been launched in collaboration with the Flemish Pain League. In this three-wave study, a broader range of aspects of the meaning system will be explored. In addition to the cognitive focus in the previous studies, emotional processes will be investigated, combined with a broader range of outcome variables tailored for this medical population (pain treatment, pain medication use, satisfaction with patient care). I’m looking forward to share the findings when the results are available!

REFERENCES


Meaningful Coping


Jessie Dezutter is currently a post-doctoral fellow of the Flanders Research Fund (FWO), attached to the Center for the Psychology of Religion, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (KU Leuven, University of Leuven). She obtained her PhD degree in psychology at the Catholic University of Leuven in 2010. Her research focuses on meaning making processes in chronic pain patients, spiritual needs in patients and in elderly people, and the role of positive psychological factors (forgiveness, gratitude, meaning in life) in coping with life stressors.

Diversity Beliefs

Diversity Beliefs, Media, and Biblical Truth: Practical Considerations for Christians in Higher Education Settings

Latrelle D. Jackson, Ph.D.

Modern times have challenged the contemporary Christian to weigh core values against changing perceptions of what is morally-acceptable behavior. Definitions of normal have shifted in the last few decades. It was not that long ago that media executives chose to portray married couples, Dick Van Dyke and Mary Tyler Moore, Lucy and Desi, and Ozzie and Harriett, in separate twin beds out of discretion for the viewer. As we transitioned from the *Leave it to Beaver* and *Happy Days* era to viewing *All in the Family*, *The Jeffersons*, *Good Times*, and the Huxtables on *The Cosby Show*, family issues and diversity topics were addressed with wit and humor. Family values were explored in bite-sized segments, yet reflected core beliefs of the time. Currently, media trends favor reality shows where the Kardashians, Real Housewives, and Bachelor contestants openly express uncensored thoughts and physical connections in unprecedented ways. The shows *Teen Mom*, *Preachers Daughters*, *Glee*, and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* feature sectors of society not presented in times past. In addition to this trend of reality entertainment, the current top rated series include *Scandal*, *Revenge*, *Devious Maids*, and *Mistresses*. The response for many Christians would be to change the channel from shows that emulate differing
moral values and exercise choice. However, let us pause for a moment and examine what is happening here. A shift has occurred in the concept of entertainment normalcy, based in part on diversity-acceptance changes in society. What impact does this have for those who identify as Christian in setting family norms, higher education standards, church acceptance practices, and establishing communities?

Diversity Tolerance vs. Appreciation vs. Acceptance

The evolution of race relations has had a multi-faceted process in American history. Similarly, the field of psychology was not exempt from curious interpretations of human valuing and equitable treatment. Several factors contributed to change happening. The Civil Rights movement, state and federal law changes, and risk-taking individuals who envisioned a better world through integrations vs. segregation propelled the country from a place of tolerance to one that targeted appreciation. By the year 2008, many believed that true racial equity had been achieved once the first bi-racial American president was elected. Then, the cause of sexual orientation acceptance transitioned to center stage. Advocates for same sex marriage and those who opposed the proposition mobilized support for state-level voting. Slowly, the media influenced social norms by increasing shows featuring sexual orientation content—Will and Grace, Modern Family, The New Normal, and soap operas. Common value for the institution of marriage was questioned and debated as the evening news featured married military icons having affairs, political figures testing intimate pictures of themselves, and religious leaders exposed for same-sex practices. When looking at these accounts with a broad lens, some themes come into focus … 1) the ability to partner with whom you are attracted to without public censure has improved, 2) relativism has found greater value in society, and 3) fundamental definitions of core concepts (i.e., racial identity, family, and spouse) are being challenged for contemporary relevance. The message to accept practices of those with differences has been getting stronger. Diversity appreciation has been heralded as positive from the position of inclusion. There is the argument that having a kaleidoscope of people representing different racial backgrounds, religious/spiritual beliefs, ages, sexual identifications, and physical/mental abilities makes American society diverse, interesting, and rich. True connection among those having differences allows fertile ground for personal growth, human valuing, and compassion for the other’s walk through life. However, is there a biblical foundation for addressing modern challenges to appreciating differences?

Biblical Perspectives

Church communities have a daunting task to spread the Word from an inclusive perspective to those who may represent multi-cultural, multi-national, or multilingual backgrounds. For many churches, there is movement toward a trans-cultural, ethnic-inclusive style of worship. God’s love for all people and His ultimate desire to call individuals from every nation, tribe, and tongue for His eternal praise is noted from Genesis to Revelation (Rev 5:9; 7:9). He conveyed diversity value by noting His love for ‘all the nations’ (Greek, panta ta ethne, or all the ethnic groups) in Acts 17: 26,27. Further, Jesus lived a life that illustrated appreciation for all by his actions and stating that he came to save the poor, the captive, the blind, the oppressed, Jews, and gentiles (Isaiah 61; Luke 4:21–27). Thus, it is not so much a question of whether one should reach out to others who may be different, but rather how does one reconcile difference with acceptance?
The earliest beginnings of the church reflected engagement among those who were different. The apostles represented diverse backgrounds (i.e., tax collectors, fishermen, etc.) and yet worked together as a team to complete a mission. Interestingly, recent statistics suggest that we are becoming more polarized and segregated (i.e., hyper-segregation) in spite of being a multicultural society in America. A recent Reuters poll indicated that many Americans have no friends of another race. More specifically, 40% of white Americans and about 25% of non-white Americans are surrounded exclusively by friends of their own race. The poll showed when looking at a broader circle of acquaintances to include co-workers, friends, and relatives, 30% of Americans are not mixing with others of a different race (Dunsmuir, 2013). In response to the Reuters poll, Tanner Colby suggested that social bonds across the color line are critical to becoming a truly integrated society. Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. echoed similar sentiments by stating, “I may do well in a segregated society, but I can never know what my total capacity is until I live in an integrated society.” However, the racial divide is only one area. Although attitudes are changing with 10 U.S. states legalizing gay marriage by extending marriage rights to same-sex couples, it may be still uncommon for heterosexuals and homosexuals to socially engage in the inner circles of friends and family. However, consider the mindset shift to not anchor on how many black, gay, or differently-abled friends do I have, but rather am I the type of person a black, gay, or differently-abled person would want to be friends with? If we are to be beacons of light with positive purpose, we must examine ourselves for the totality of what we reflect.

Integration Steps

Diversity awareness and appreciation is no longer a linear process that centers on racial and cultural valuing for the modern-day Christian. Aside from religious/spiritual factors (i.e., diversity in beliefs, styles of worship, religious choices, and modes of service), media influences (i.e., shifts in attitudes, rating-driven programming), and changing social strata/mores in American society (i.e., demographic trends, relativistic thinking, and social media impact), there is still the call to love all people. John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” The term whosoever makes it clear that no one is excluded or left behind. However, knowing what to do is sometimes easier than knowing how to do it. Following are some suggestions for how to advance one’s personal diversity appreciation mission:

1. Explore your current diversity-based personal, spiritual, and workplace values for this phase of your life. We tend to update our wardrobe, home, or hairstyle, but rarely review our beliefs for update consideration in light of life experience influencing growth (i.e., wisdom). A periodic check to evaluate what beliefs you have, the source, and how did they form for you is helpful to remain anchored from a critical thinking perspective. In addition, this process will assist you in appreciating positive developments while being sensitive to infractions, injustices, and inappropriate communication. Microinsults and microaggressions can be subtle or directed at someone else. Yet, they can have substantial effects on the targeted individual and
the work environment (Burrow et al., 2010; Dovidio et al., 1996). It is important to be clear about what you are prepared to do should these events occur, prior to them happening. Higher education settings can be wonderful areas for diversity growth; however, Christian higher education settings have an extra layer of social monitoring that can impact free expression and controversial dialogues. Navigating one's identity concerns and social perception are important considerations that are often not addressed (Steele et al., 2002).

2. **Extend yourself.** Humans tend to operate within established routines pretty well. Change, although uncomfortable at times, can be good for the mind-body-soul. Consider asking a colleague who represents some dimension of diversity to discuss a meaningful area of difference to expand your perspective. Discuss contemporary social or legal issues with students, faculty, church members, or community partners to discern different viewpoints. It is helpful to have forums for discussion. Oftentimes, college students don’t have structured venues for processing thoughts about diversity issues—leaving issues unsettled or unexplored (Blume et al., 2012; Chonody et al., 2009; Rosik et al., 2007). Openness to experiences and actually engaging in diverse encounters has been shown to reduce prejudicial views concerning minority groups (Cramer et al., 2013). Pick up a book that addresses a diversity topic you’ve never considered before. We must know the world we are trying to impact.

3. **Consider creative ways to infuse diversity components in regular work activities.** Traditionally, diversity competency was thought to be achieved via multicultural academic courses, workshops/seminars, and continuing education training. However, it can also be achieved or advanced by incorporating diversity discussions in higher education research team meetings, faculty/staff meetings, university planning forums, annual review planning, student orientation meetings, student-faculty relations meetings, syllabi planning, or outreach presentations. Inviting key people who could add a certain depth to committees/task forces or incorporating social media information to make academic lessons more relevant for student comprehension and retention also can be beneficial. This applied approach promotes true growth and fosters appreciation. Further, students can see diversity matters addressed on a regular basis and it becomes a normal process—giving them the resources to model it in their circles as well.

**Conclusion**

We live in an era of great promise, unprecedented resources for connection and education, and global access. However, we must be wise stewards of these incredible options as we stay grounded in biblical truths. Moral dilemmas, legal inconsistencies, and social patterns of acceptance may change from decade to decade. In spite of these shifts, we have been entrusted to equip the next generation through our roles as educators, psychologists, parents, family members, or community partners. In the words of Ernest...
Istook, “America’s strength is not our diversity; our strength is our ability to unite people of different backgrounds around common principles. A common language is necessary to reach that goal.” That common language can be based on the message of God’s love for all His children. For as we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors — making a difference in our corner of the world, let us not forget to reach for the diverse hands of our next generation.

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LATRELLE D. JACKSON, Ph.D., is a licensed clinical psychologist and clinically-certified forensic counselor. Dr. Jackson is an associate professor and the director of clinical training in the School of Psychology and Counseling at Regent University. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, Master of Arts in Rehabilitation Counseling, and a doctorate in Counseling Psychology from The University of Georgia. Her APA accredited internship was completed at Michigan State University. Dr. Jackson’s professional appointments include working at Penn State University as a staff psychologist/multicultural student programs and services coordinator and The University of Florida as a clinical assistant professor, A.S.P.I.R.E. coordinator, coordinator of intern consultation, and the peer counselor program coordinator. She has held academic appointments with the Department of Rehabilitation Counseling, African American Studies, Counselor Education, and Counseling Psychology at these institutions. Committed to integrated wellness, community empowerment, moral leadership, and culturally-sensitive education, Dr. Jackson has engaged in a variety of academic, business, political, and civic endeavors. In 2011, she was elected to the office of Secretary for the American Psychological Association (Division 36), while retaining her position as Membership Chairperson for three years. Currently, she serves as the Psychological Health Consultant for Esteem Magazine, an Atlanta, Georgia based firm.
GRADUATE AWARDS:  (LISTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Peryl Agishtein  (CUNY)
Clinical Significance of Secure Attachment to G-d: Religious Buffer against Anxiety

Michael Cadaret  (U of Akron)
Experiences of Religious Graduate Students in Academic Settings

Brandon Griffin  (VCU)
God-Image, Self-Forgiveness, and Poor Mental Health among Christian Inmates

Benjamin Meagher  (U CT)
Embodied and Embedded Prayer: How Posture and Setting Influence the Content of Prayer

Nina Tilka  (Biola)
Religious Struggle, Hope, Humility, and Coping in Newly Diagnosed Cancer Patients

Kaylyn Watterson  (Bucknell)
God Primes and Eating Behavior

UNDERGRADUATE AWARD:

Nina Franza & Kelly Laliberty  (St. Joseph’s College)
Loving vs. Punitive God: Empathetic Reactions to Others
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1. Type the title in CAPITAL LETTERS on the first line. Skip a line.
2. Type the author(s) and primary affiliation(s). (Affiliations placed in parentheses). Skip a line.
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Time allotted varies from 50, 90, or 110 minutes. Please indicate preferred time duration. A minimum of two presenters is required. Submit a 300-word overall abstract in addition to a 300-word abstract for each presentation with name of presenter(s).

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Division 36 — Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality,

- promotes the application of psychological research methods and interpretive frameworks to diverse forms of religion and spirituality;

- encourages the incorporation of the results of such work into clinical and other applied settings;

- and fosters constructive dialogue and interchange between psychological study and practice, on the one hand, and religious perspectives and institutions on the other.

The division is strictly nonsectarian and welcomes the participation of all persons, without regard to personal faith, who view religion as a significant factor in human functioning.

The division’s quarterly Newsletter contains original articles, book reviews, announcements, and news of interest to division members.

NEWSLETTER
SOCIETY FOR THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

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The Newsletter is the official publication of the American Psychological Association Division 36, Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality.

The Newsletter invites articles, interviews, book reviews and announcements relevant to the interdisciplinary focus of psychology and religion.

Editorial inquiries should be addressed to:
Gina M. Brelsford, Ph.D.
Editor, Division 36 Newsletter
Associate Professor of Psychology
Penn State University, Harrisburg
W311 Olmsted
777 W. Harrisburg Pike
Middletown, PA 17057
Office: (717) 948-6759
Email: gmy103@psu.edu