Last year in Montreal, in her President’s remarks at the First Business Meeting, Judith Lieu challenged us to reflect on the current state of SNTS—its overall mission and ethos, and its future shape. Specifically, she invited each of us to ask, “Why would someone want to be a member of SNTS?” She also addressed the gender imbalance within the Society and invited all of us to think more broadly and creatively about issues related to diversity and inclusiveness. Her remarks prompted extensive discussion at the Montreal meeting, and the inclusion of her remarks in the October/November 2016 newsletter broadened the conversation. Over the last year, many of you have responded thoughtfully to our invitation to offer constructive suggestions about how we might advance the Society’s mission more effectively. We deeply appreciate those who have actively participated in this ongoing conversation and who have taken the time to write lengthy emails or letters, or to engage us directly in serious conversation about the Society.

I am pleased to report that we have made progress on several fronts. First, on the process of membership renewal using the Cambridge University Press [website](https://www.cambridge.org/core/membership/snts). Over the past several years some have experienced difficulty in renewing their membership electronically. We are also aware that a significant portion of members, especially older members, prefer more traditional forms of membership renewal, and we have discussed ways to accommodate the various levels of electronic expertise within the Society. In response to our feedback, CUP completely reworked their website, which was launched in January, 2017. There were some initial glitches, but reports we have received indicate that it is now more user-friendly. We still encourage all members to renew their membership regularly, and to report any difficulties you might have to the Committee or to [CUP](mailto:memberservices@cambridge.org?subject=SNTS) directly. If some members still prefer to renew their membership by paying with a check/cheque or cash at the General Meeting, that is still a possibility.

Second, the SNTS [website](snts.international). We have also worked hard to make the Society’s website more welcoming and user-friendly. Those who are interested in learning about the Society, its history and mission, its past General Meetings, its publication program including *NTS* and SNTSMS, or becoming a member of the Society can now find out how to do so more easily. There is obviously still more work to do, but we think the public face of the Society as visible on the website is much better.

Third, the members’ Survey. Out of the Montreal discussions, and in continuing discussion through the year, arose the idea of a questionnaire that we could send to members. In response to these suggestions, the Officers, especially Andrew Clarke, spent a good bit of time developing a questionnaire that was both comprehensive but also responsive to the various concerns that arose out of the Montreal meeting. During April–June 2017, an electronic Survey of Members was conducted, in which those members listed with email addresses were invited to respond to a series of questions about the Society.

We were able to contact 751 members, 307 of whom responded. This 40% response rate, we think, suggests a significant level of interest and commitment by the membership. And we are grateful to all those members who took the time to complete the questionnaire, and to provide written comments, sometimes lengthy, sometimes candid, but always thoughtful. Although the identity of respondents was anonymous, we did ask for demographic information in order to get a sense of the range and type of respondents. The typical respondent was on average 63 years old (standard deviation of 12 years); 33% of the respondents were in the 55–64 age group. In terms of gender distribution (where gender was declared), 12.5% of the respondents were female, 87.5% were male. The typical respondent has been a member of SNTS for 19 years. In terms of country/geographical distribution: 32.5% of the respondents were from the United States and Canada; 25% from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland; 17.5% from Europe West; 6.8% Australia, New Zealand; 6.2% Europe North; 5.5% Europe South; 2.4% Africa, South America; 2.1% Europe East; 2.1% Asia.

The Officers have spent a good bit of time trying to digest the Survey responses. We had the happy coincidence of having access to Dr. Felix Wolter (Mainz, Germany), a specialist in quantitative methods of empirical social research, who, together with one of his students, coded and analyzed the quantitative survey data. All this information was circulated in advance to the Committee, who spent almost an hour discussing the Survey, its main findings, and possible implications for future decisions.

Some broadly defined themes emerged. Respondents affirmed the prestigious character of the Society and strongly supported the way in which membership nominations and election to the Society occur. Respondents were generally satisfied with the organization of the General Meetings, but registered some dissatisfaction with the range of weeks in which the General Meetings occur, and also some dissatisfaction with the policy that a particular guest can attend only once in four years. Respondents reported a strong overlap between their personal scholarly interests and the Seminar Groups, but less overlap between their personal scholarly interests and the Main Papers or the Simultaneous Short Papers. This confirms the opinion of many that there is a very strong level of support for the current Seminar structure—i.e., delegates commit to a single seminar, which meets in three ninety-minute sessions, with a range of English, German, and French options. Some respondents, however, expressed the desire for more seminars that reflected new trajectories of research interests. Respondents are highly satisfied with the duration of the General Meetings (the three-day format, Wednesday–Friday). As for factors relating to the appeal of the General Meeting, attendance does not vary significantly based on a member’s country of origin, although members from the US and Canada, and from Australia and New Zealand, attend significantly fewer meetings than those from German-speaking countries. The overall costs of the General Meeting and the geographical location were important considerations for a significant number of respondents. The most important factor for those who regularly attend General Meetings is the opportunity to hear about new research and to meet academic colleagues and friends. The latter item, the opportunity for social interaction, may suggest that the most sacrosanct part of the General Meeting is the morning and afternoon coffee breaks, along with other opportunities for social interaction. Respondents also expressed general satisfaction with the overall size of the Society.

But beyond these general themes we have also tried to identify currents and undercurrents relating to the ethos of the Society and its working mission. We especially recognize the rich variety of interests and perspectives within the Society, and that the voices of those that, for whatever reason, may not be heard, or that may not be as loud, must still be heard. There is, for example, the recognition that the overall profile of the Society tends to be older, white males from Western Europe and North America, and that it would benefit the Society for that profile to change so that the overall membership would include more younger members, more non-whites, more females, and more members from Eastern Europe, Asia, the Pacific Rim, Africa, and South America.

The Survey has also prompted us to think about the overall context in which we now pursue our mission. In the early decades of the Society’s existence, it represented a distinct, if not unique, professional guild in which New Testament scholars, especially more senior scholars, could share their research and ideas. But over the last several years, other professional societies organized around biblical studies and related fields have grown, so that now individual scholars have to choose among competing interests and multiple societies such as the Catholic Biblical Association and the Society of Biblical Literature. This year, for example, the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Berlin happened to conflict directly with our meeting in Pretoria. John Kutsko reported to me that approximately 1,100 persons had pre-registered for the Berlin SBLIM, and that on-site registrations would bring the number even higher—the largest International SBL meeting to date. He also reported that 19% of the registrants are from the United States. This schedule conflict prompted us to talk with SBL about the scheduling of future meetings. Earlier this year I met with John in Atlanta, and we agreed to try to work together in scheduling future meetings in order to avoid such unfortunate conflicts, although we recognized the difficulty of doing this, given the number of factors that are at work in planning a meeting at an international site.

Another factor affecting attendance and participation in the General Meeting is the emergence and growth of our various Liaison Committees within the Society—Eastern European, African, Asia Pacific, and Latin American Caribbean. As an intentional part of our mission to ensure the internationalization of SNTS, we have been successful in arranging meetings and colloquia in different parts of the world, not only as a way of establishing the Society’s presence in those areas but also in providing a way for New Testament scholars to connect with each other and with the Society as a whole. We think these efforts have been beneficial and that they must continue, but they are also a reminder that the General Meeting is not the only visible venue in which the work of the Society is carried out. In terms of attendance, members, mainly for financial reasons, sometimes must choose between attending a regional meeting or the General Meeting. But that does not mean that the scope of the Society is shrinking; it only means that the Society’s work no longer becomes visible only in the form of an annual General Meeting in a single location.

Where do we go from here? At the Pretoria 2017 Committee meeting, we agreed to appoint a subcommittee, working under the rubric, “The Future Shape of SNTS,” comprised as follows: Andrew Clarke, *Secretary* of SNTS; Bill Loader, *Assistant Secretary for International Initiatives;* Judith Gundry (from the Committee); Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole (University of Pretoria and United Bible Societies), and Christina Maria Kreinecker (University of Salzburg). I agreed to chair the subcommittee. Our task is to continue processing the results from the Survey, along with feedback that we receive from you at this meeting, as well as the feedback from other members not present in Pretoria, but to bring specific proposals for discussion (and possible action) by the Committee at the 2018 General Meeting in Athens.

Some concluding paraenetic remarks:

First, I invite you, as current stakeholders in SNTS, to participate actively in shaping the Society’s vision for the future. Let each of us continue to ask, and to discuss among ourselves, “What is the fundamental mission of SNTS?”; “What ethos do we wish to characterize the Society, with all of its rich diversity and many perspectives?”; “How can we best implement our mission?”

Second, I invite each of us, as active, indeed, pro-active, creative stakeholders, to exercise our initiative and to take new initiatives; for example, in thinking creatively about the seminar groups, and, when appropriate, collaborating with other members in forming new seminars, so that our seminar offerings can more nearly reflect the broad range of interests represented by scholars working in New Testament studies and related fields. I would also encourage you to be pro-active in suggesting to the Committee the names of persons who should be considered as *President* of the Society; or who should be considered to read Main Papers; or who should serve on the Committee, or on the Editorial Boards of the journal and the monograph series. And in keeping with Francis Watson’s and Paul Trebilco’s exhortation, to channel our own publications toward *New Testament Studies* and our monograph series. Another way to exercise initiative is by renewing your membership subscription regularly, and to encourage other members to do so.

Finally, I invite you to nominate new members. I repeat what I said in Montreal—we need to grow the Society, to increase the number of members. This year we reported the deaths of 33 members; we also received word from 21 members—mostly senior members—that they were terminating their membership in the Society. Over the last year, we have worked hard to update the membership list to ensure that we have accurate contact information, and in doing so, we have come to realize that, while there are approximately 900-1000 names on the membership list, the core of active, regular dues-paying members, is much smaller. There is no magic number of an ideal membership, although the respondents to the Survey indicated that they liked the current size of the Society. But the future vitality of the Society depends on current members becoming—and remaining—active stakeholders, and by seeing the Society as a major focus of their interest, and as one of the main venues in which their research can be reported and discussed. But the overall strength and health of the Society also depends upon our reaching out to new members, identifying younger scholars, both within our own circle of students and colleagues and outside our immediate network, becoming mentors to them, helping them to shape their own research trajectories so that they can meet the high scholarly standards for membership in SNTS—standards and scholarly criteria on which we have worked and formed a working consensus over many years. On a personal note, I still remember the ways in which Abe Malherbe, of blessed memory, reached out to younger scholars, those who were outside his immediate circle of students and friends, speaking to them at SNTS and SBL, corresponding with them, encouraging them to become members of SNTS. It is also worth noting the practical side of expanding our membership—a larger membership helps ensure our financial stability. The math is simple—the more members we have, the higher the attendance at General Meetings, the greater likelihood that Local Organizing Committees will be able to budget for lower delegate costs. I am delighted to report that this year we accepted thirty-eight new members, a significant increase over the number that we normally receive—an indication that the overall membership has been responsive to our earlier call to be more pro-active in nominating new members.

I would like to close by expressing thanks, first to Andrew Clarke, our *Secretary,* for his herculean efforts on behalf of the Society this last year. He took the initiative in developing and administering the Members’ Survey, along with processing and distributing its results. He has also expended an enormous amount of time working on the Membership List, updating it and trying to find accurate contact information for each member. His efforts in updating our website are also evident. I would also like to thank the other Officers, Todd Still, Kathy Ehrensperger, and Bill Loader for their many efforts on behalf of the Society. I would also like to thank my predecessor Judith Lieu, and my successor Michael Wolter, for their thoughtful collaboration on a variety of matters relating to the Society. Over the last two years, those of us involved in the leadership of the Society have exchanged countless emails—hundreds, I’m sure—and through this mass of correspondence I have been struck by the seriousness of purpose with which each person operates, and the thoughtful, deliberative tone in which the business of the Society is conducted.

It is worth remembering that SNTS operates with a very skeletal organization. Unlike other professional societies, such as SBL, which have large memberships, a broad financial base, and a large, full-time staff, along with an elaborate infrastructure, SNTS is essentially run by volunteers. Our Officers and Editors receive modest honoraria for their valuable work, but their work for SNTS is a labor of love. It is one of many other things they do. The same goes for Local Organizing Committees—their extensive planning and work is completely altruistic, done on behalf of the other members. SNTS is a non-profit organization in the best sense—pursuing our mission, not for financial profit or even for the grandiose purpose of dominating the market or the field of New Testament studies, but as a volunteer organization that trades on, and even flourishes, because of the active good will and selfless service of its members and leadership.

Carl Holladay  
*Past President* SNTS