

A year of new beginnings

July 2009

If you are reading this news, then we are on the road. That's right, Westar Institute and Polebridge Press are moving. In March Willamette University issued an invitation for us to move our offices to its campus in Salem, Oregon. The offer included free space.

Both planning and good timing led to this invitation. Willamette acquired a 4,000 square-foot building on the edge of the campus that had formerly housed a law firm, and so space suddenly became available. Willamette President Lee Pelton is a supporter of the work of the Jesus Seminar and sees a Westar presence on campus as adding to the University's current efforts to create and support new research centers, called Centers for Excellence. Willamette is also interested in having an academic press on campus, and sees Polebridge as filling this need. We will share the building with the Center for Ancient Studies and Archaeology and the Center for Sustainable Communities.

We plan to move early in July in order to get settled in our new offices before the start of the 2009–2010 academic year, ahead of the chaos that entails. But also to allow time for Char Matejovsky to oversee the organization of the new offices and hiring of new staff. And that brings us to our next big piece of news.

October 2009

Char Matejovsky has asked to be relieved of her duties as Interim Director of Westar Institute and Polebridge Press in October. When Bob Funk died in September 2005, Char assured the Board of Directors that she would stay on as the chief operating officer while the Board launched the Campaign for Westar and made plans for new leadership. She will have served four years this coming Fall and feels it is time for her to move on to something new, and for Westar to find an academic Director. But she is not cutting all her ties with Westar and Polebridge. She has agreed to become a consultant and part-time employee, continuing her editorial role with *The Fourth R* and keeping other responsibilities still to be determined, but which will certainly include mentoring her successor.

Char grew up on a ranch near Wolf Point, Montana and majored in French at the University of Montana in Missoula. She was an exchange student to Mexico in 1966–1967, studied at the Sorbonne in 1969–1970, and served as a teaching assistant in France in 1972–1973 and a T.A. at the University of Montana in 1973–1974. In the Summer of 1974, Bob Funk hired her as a departmental secretary,

and she subsequently became the administrative assistant for Scholars Press, the publishing arm of learned societies in the field of religion also founded by Bob. They later married and worked as a team founding Polebridge Press in 1981 and Westar Institute in 1986.

Char is also a songwriter, author, and avid traveler. While Bob was the brains behind the Jesus Seminar and the face of Westar, Char has joked that she was the brawn that implemented Bob's ideas for over thirty years. She has also been the heart of the Westar family. We will celebrate her leadership at the Fall banquet in Santa Rosa. Please plan to join us for this special event.

Who will become the next Westar-Polebridge Director? In the wake of Char's impending retirement, the Board has begun a search for an interim director who is willing to commit to the position for at least three years while the campaign to endow a Director's chair is being completed. The search committee will be seeking both applications and nominations for the position. A formal announcement of the search is forthcoming.

Prior efforts to find a successor to Bob Funk have faltered over the fact that the Santa Rosa offices were not linked to a university: academics prefer to be on a campus with colleagues and resources for their research. The move to Willamette will remove that obstacle. The new Director will find that his/her colleagues include not only myself but Westar Fellow Stephen Patterson, chair of the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins, who will join the Willamette faculty next year. And the new academic director of Westar will be eligible for adjunct status in Willamette's Religious Studies Department. These advantages, coupled with significantly reduced costs for Westar and Polebridge, and access to other university services, will all contribute to the stability of Westar and Polebridge in these troubled financial times.

Many thanks are due to the joint Westar/Polebridge staff for their dedication and hard work in so expertly leading us through the inevitable period of transition following Bob Funk's death. A special thanks to Santa Rosa staff Lee Masters, Mark Vallerga, and Jennifer Julander, who will not be making the move to Salem. Business Manager Bill Lehto and Graphic Designer Robaire Ream will remain on staff and provide continuity with the Salem staff.

Another new beginning

Andrew Scrimgeour, the Dean of Libraries at Drew University, will become the new chair of the Westar Board of Directors this July. We are very fortunate to have his experienced and able leadership at this time in our history. The staff and the Board have worked hard to prepare us for the next chapter in the history of Westar and Polebridge.

—Lane McGaughy, Chair, Board of Directors