

# The Anna Howard Shaw Center

VOL. 41

FALL NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1

## Women's Leadership in Academia

Welcome to the Boston University School of Theology Anna Howard Shaw Center Newsletter. We're thrilled to announce our theme for this semester: Women's Leadership in Academia. In this issue you'll read stories from educators, administrators, and students who thoughtfully portray their own experiences with leading in an academic setting.

Whether their experience is with K-12 education, returning to the classroom in later life, earning confidence in teaching, or navigating higher education as both educator and administrator, these insightful and authentic contributions to the field of academia relay messages of resilience and hope for an even brighter, and more inclusive, feminist future of learning.

### Words Sweet as Honey

This edition's featured poem comes from Boston University Master of Divinity student Anna Jeide-Detweiler. The poem was shared at this year's ThECology Co-Creation Workshop.

*How is it  
that bees being bees  
can be so sweet  
to me?*

*All I can offer at all  
in return  
is what they're always after  
Asters*

*Buzz unbound  
Buzz free*

*Once I heard His Holiness the Dalai Lama say*

*"In my next life  
I want to be a honeybee"  
If that's good enough for him  
it's certainly good enough for me*





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# Expanding Worldviews

## The Annual Anna Howard Shaw Center Fall Multicultural Exposition

By Anna Howard Shaw Center Staff



Image description: Seated audience members and featured speakers smile for the camera at the Anna Howard Shaw Center 2023 Multicultural Expo

The annual Anna Howard Shaw Center Multicultural Expo was held on Wednesday, November 1st, 2023 from 5:30pm-7:30pm in STH 325. This event honored the many diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences brought to the School of Theology by the uniqueness of its student body. It's an event the Shaw Center looks forward to hosting each year, and one that has earned a significant reputation among students as offering an array of incredible food, exciting music, and the unique opportunity to learn more about the cultures of our friends here at the School of Theology!

The Multicultural Expo was made possible by the featured presentations of eight students: School of Theology Master of Divinity students, as well as a PhD student in the Boston University History Department. Each presentation provided its own unique glimpse into a specific aspect of the speaker's culture, and in so doing broadened the worldview of each and every audience member. The first speaker was **Sandra Barrios** (3rd year MDiv student) presenting on "The Underground Goddess and The Lost Feathered Headdress."





## Ancestral History, Tai Chi, & a Tapestry of Culture

Barrios began her presentation with a reflection on personal childhood memories in la Ciudad de México. She then explained how transitioning to Boston and attending Boston University invited her to take a closer look at her culture, roots, and ancestors. Barrios described the existential curiosity that stemmed from the question, “What is your ethnicity?” This very question ushered Barrios into an intense investigation of her culture, where she studied about the goddess Coyolxauhqui, the history of her ancestors, and the story of the sacred feathered headdress gifted by governor Moctezuma to Hernán Cortés, a Spanish conquistador, as a request for Cortés’ departure from the territory. Barrios relayed that while studying the “spirituality of Mesoamerican cultures is complex,” she continues to discover herself and her Indigenous ancestry through this journey of learning.

**Aixin Yi** (3rd year PhD student) began her presentation by asking the audience a simple question: what do you think of when you think of Tai Chi? Immediately responses rang out, answers such as “slowness!” “exercise?” “peaceful!” With a laugh Yi agreed that each of these answers could be used to describe Tai Chi. She then went on



to give a brief history of this ancient tradition: describing her own journey to Tai Chi, the significance of the Yin Yang symbol, and concluding with a personal demonstration of key movements and positions such as “Part the Wild Horse’s Mane” and “White Crane Flaps Its Wings.” At the end of the presentation, Yi invited an audience member to practice alongside her, instigating an uproar of cheers and applause from the group.

**Evan Henry** (2nd year MDiv student) provided the evening’s third presentation, and delved into what he termed “The Rich Tapestry of Indian Culture.” By the end of Henry’s presentation the audience was familiar with numerous exciting elements of Indian culture, gaining a



## Maasai Traditions & Igbo Idioms

newfound appreciation for the religious and political diversity within the Nation, the multiple languages spoken, the traditional Indian clothing styles, the festivals and celebrations, the cuisine, landmarks, and contributions to global culture, and, of course, the music! Henry concluded his vibrant presentation by playing his guitar and teaching the audience a Tamil song often used for religious worship.

**Philip Kirui** (3rd year MDiv student) followed, and began his presentation with a musical collaboration between himself and Henry.



Image description: Evan Henry shares his musical skills by playing a Tamil worship song on his guitar

smiles. Kirui then presented on the topic of “The Kenyan Culture–Maasai.” His presentation focused on Maasai history, and included details regarding warriorship, enkaji (homes or house), food preferences and restrictions, Adumu (the famous jumping dance), and dress code. Kirui finished his presentation by discussing the importance of maintaining familial relationships within Maasai culture.

Next to present was **Mustard Uzu** (2nd year MDiv student) with a presentation entitled “The Igbo and Their Idioms.” Uzu introduced his presentation by describing the Igbo, well-known as Ndi Igbo, as a group largely located in Southeastern Nigeria. Uzu went on to describe the cruciality of language and specific speech for this particular group of people,



Image description: Mazi. Mustard Uzu presents on the importance of language within Ndi Igbo culture

The two presenters invited the audience to participate in their song, and soon the entire room was filled with music, clapping, and wide





## Religious Culture & Marriage

claiming that one could come to know the Igbo through gaining an understanding of their most used phrases: phrases such as “Oghor madu bu afor nne ya” (one’s in-laws are family), and “egbe bere ugo bere nke si ibe ya ebela nku kwa ya” (people of different biases can coexist if everyone is willing to collaborate). Uzu concluded his presentation by commenting upon the priority of peacemaking within Ndi Igbo culture.

**J.J. Martinez** (2nd year MDiv student) represented the Wesleyan Student Association as he elaborated upon the idea of religion



Image description: Hanbok, a Korean traditional style of cloth, paired with a matching patterned handbag and red and gold silk shoes

as culture in a presentation titled “Love Divine: The Wesleyan Way.” Martinez asked the audience, “What do our traditions have to offer a hurting world? For me it goes back



Image description: A few Multicultural Expo featured speakers embrace for a post-presentation photo  
(Left to right: Philip Kirui, Eunji Lee, Maria Gorret Nampiima, J.J. Martinez)

to what Wesley did, how he acted with people and saw the Divine within others.” The room quieted and the audience listened intently as Martinez spoke about treating others with love and respect, and called the audience to a life that doesn’t simply “leave love in this room,” but instead takes love outside the walls of STH and notices the divinity at work within each living being. He concluded, “How can religion be culture? We love.”

The evening pushed forward with a descriptive presentation on “Traditional Marriage Ceremonies in Buganda Culture,” by **Maria Gorret Nampiima** (2nd year MDiv student). Nampiima began with an explanation of ceremonial wedding attire for a traditional bride, and then elaborated upon what a traditional groom might wear, as well as guests of the marriage

### Introduction Day & Korean Food Delivery

ceremony. The audience was then introduced to the concept of Kukyaala: a process in which a future groom is introduced to family members in stages before the Kwanjula or Introduction Day. Nampiima concluded her presentation by sharing a video of her personal friend's Introduction Day—allowing audience members a richer grasp of the traditional marriage ceremonies and celebrations taking place within Nampiima's home culture.

The Multicultural Expo came to a close with a presentation from **Eunji Lee** (2nd year MDiv student) on "Service Delivery Culture of Korea." Beginning with a conversation on the importance of the Han River in Seoul, Lee described how social life is bolstered by nearness to this famous body of water, as it's known as a space where folks can gather to take walks, play games, and most importantly...order delivery and eat! However, Lee noted, the phenomenon of food delivery is nothing new for Korean society, as the first recorded Korean takeout order was a 1768 request for Pyongyang cold noodles. Concluding her presentation with a note about how food delivery has only increased in the present day, and thrives near spaces such as the Han River, Lee ended by stating, "I think that the



Image description: Shaw Center Staff Claudine Uwizeyimana (left) and Shaw Center Director Dr. Choi Hee An (right) show off their cultural clothing

deep love for food and the fast-paced lifestyle in Korea have contributed to the development of the delivery culture from an early time. If you ever have the opportunity to visit Korea, I highly recommend going to the Han River and trying fried chicken."

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Each unique presentation offered its audience an opportunity to listen, learn, and, in a way, experience a culture and expand a personal worldview. The Anna Howard Shaw Center is profoundly grateful to all of our featured speakers, as well as each and every audience member who attended this event.

We hope to see you at next year's Multicultural Expo!





# Calling Campus Home

A Life Dedicated to Teaching, A Life Committed to Learning

By Krista Zobel

When I graduated with my MFA in Nonfiction Writing and embarked on my teaching career at the age of 43, it was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream. I had married young, had five children in my twenties, and given up all hope of finishing my undergraduate degree, not to mention earning an MFA. When through a strange convergence of events I was able to fund my education through my husband's military benefits, I jumped at the chance.

When I got hired as an adjunct professor to teach first year writing at both a community college and a four-year university, I thought I had reached the pinnacle of my existence. I was a natural in the classroom, energized by my own lectures and interactions with students. It wasn't until I received a snippy letter from HR that I realized I had neglected to pick up my first three paychecks. I would literally have done the job for free.

Before long, I learned a major downside to being an adjunct: unpredictability. Course offerings are enrollment dependent. Some semesters, I'd have more classes offered to me than I could cram into my schedule. Other semesters, offerings would be scarce.

**It was a juggling act, fraught with uncertainty.**

The financial roller coaster was a nuisance more than a crisis until my divorce in 2018. Unexpectedly, at the age of 47, I was supporting myself for the first time. I added two more colleges to my circuit which meant spreading myself across four schools, traveling and teaching as many as eight classes a term.

It wasn't the erratic commuting schedule or intense workload that finally got to me. It was the feeling of helplessness and vulnerability built into waiting for course assignments semester after semester. There is no hierarchy in the adjunct community. Courses are not assigned based on seniority, or even merit. Availability is criteria number one.

I quickly realized the best way for me to achieve both job satisfaction and job security was to make myself conspicuous through creativity and innovation. Embracing the maxim that it's easier to apologize than ask permission, I experimented with some redesigns of the first year writing courses, then invited my department chairs to pop into the Learning Management System and see what I'd done.





I reported on student feedback, successes, and things I'd tweak next time around. This led to taking an active role on a small curriculum committee in which I was the only non-full time faculty member included.

My intended consequence was achieved. Before long, I was no longer unsure of whether I'd be offered a course. Program directors were shifting their schedules around to accommodate mine. But an unintended consequence also occurred; I discovered my own particular gifts, talents, and latent ambitions. Teaching basic writing courses was no longer enough for me. I started developing new courses and leading the way on projects and initiatives. I was growing personally and professionally, which was exciting, but I was growing in place.

### **After eight years, it was time for me to say, "Enough."**

As I write this, I'm 52 years old, living in a dorm in graduate housing at Boston University, a month into the second year of a three-year degree. I am thriving, and by this I mean I am expanding my range of knowledge, branching outward in directions I could never have imagined if I had stayed where I was. I am planted in a richly diverse community alongside passionate, creative classmates. I am taking courses that range from the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence

to Providing Spiritual Care.

Practically no one hears of my venture without asking, "What are you going to do with that degree?" It's hard for people to understand that my decision to go back to school was not part of a strategy to advance my career. It was entirely about my personal growth. I needed to broaden and thicken my experience of the world. I needed to challenge myself by doing something difficult outside my comfort zone. I needed to chase down the answers to some big questions in order to expand the repertoire of what I have to offer my students and my world.

I'm not sure what my next step will be. Maybe I'll stick around the metaphorical ivy halls a bit longer and go for a PhD. Maybe I'll move back to New Hampshire and resume the erratic, nomadic adjunct life. Either way, one thing is certain. Whether as a student, a teacher, or both, you'll find me on a campus somewhere, learning and growing, calling it home.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Krista Zobel is an adjunct English & Humanities professor who is also a second year Master of Divinity student at Boston University, researching ways to provide spiritual leadership in secular spaces. She divides her time between Boston and Manchester, NH.



# Embracing Your Power

## Learning to Exist Authentically in the Classroom

By Aixin Yi

Since I became a graduate student, my passion for teaching and education has become stronger. Nevertheless, I got quite nervous about my first teaching assignment for a course about the Cold War and contemporary politics, which is not my expertise. I asked a senior PhD student who served as a teaching fellow for that course for advice: “How can I demonstrate my intellectual authority among the students?” He encouraged me to be authentic and let the students know that, though I did not major in international politics, I still have skills and lessons to offer to them.

Being authentic, I like this piece of advice. But he followed the encouragement with a warning: “I have to acknowledge that I am a white man, which means that the society already gives me a privilege you don’t have. You might need to take extra effort to prove yourself.”

*Is that true?* I wondered. It never really crossed my mind that my identity would matter for my teaching career. I come from a well educated middle class family, and received education from top schools before I became a doctoral student. One of the best things about engaging Chinese history and

mission studies in the U.S. is that my colleagues largely embrace and advocate for diversity. My environment has protected me well from most tangible prejudices and discriminations against females and non-whites (of course, I have encountered certain forms of microaggression, but I seldom consider them disturbing). I would also say that I am privileged.

But life changes, and though it is challenging, change presents an opportunity for us to grow. Now I was in a position of unfamiliarity and uncertainties.

### **How could I overcome the fear of not having a strong voice in the classroom?**

At the end of October, I gave the first lecture of my life in front of sixty students and the professor. The lecture was about the Vietnam War, which again, I originally knew little about. Needless to say, it took me days, if not weeks, to swallow the new materials, digest them, and establish a clear and cohesive historical narrative. But the process was a journey of both pain and joy. Though the history was distressing, I was so refreshed to learn new things and was even surprised by my





learning ability! Though I don't like the pathologized way of describing the mentality associated with "imposter syndrome," I knew people, like me, who struggled with self-doubt often don't trust that they already have the skills to overcome certain challenges. But, over time, I came to realize that the voices of the imposter are lies, even though I can easily forget this truth when I am feeling dreadful.

Though I was confident about the materials I prepared, right before I stepped to the front of the classroom, I was caught by my anxiety: *What if the students catch mistakes in my English pronunciation? What if they think my lecture is not as clear as the professor's? What if they think I am boring?* Noticing the rumbling noises, I took a deep breath and used one of my favorite verses to pray: "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

I then started my lecture by telling the class how my expertise in East Asian studies and transnational history could offer a different perspective than the U.S.-centered narrative of the Vietnam War. During the 75 minutes, I felt self-conscious about reading from a script at the beginning, but gradually I became accustomed to the

discomfort and felt assured at the rightness of where I was, of who I was.

After the class, several students came to tell me they appreciated what I brought to the class.

**The professor smiled at me, saying "See, you do have the power. You just need to know how to embrace the power."**

Did my identity as a non-white female really matter? Maybe, or maybe not. But instead of wasting time and energy thinking about what persona I wanted to build up to overwrite the "disadvantage" of my identity, I liberated myself from the imposter lies by simply being myself. When we face a challenge, we do have the power to lean into the unknown and discomfort, and it is usually where our identity can shine.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Aixin Yi is a third year PhD student in Boston University's History Department. Her research investigates the agricultural missions and rural reconstruction movement in early-twentieth-century China. She loves studying the history of Protestant missions and World Christianity. Yi is originally from the tropical island of Hainan, China.



# A Celebration of Commitment

## Finding Strength Amidst Struggle

By W. Pearl Wilkinson

In a world dominated by rapidly evolving technology, the concept of returning to academia after a 40-year hiatus from graduate school was daunting. But for this resilient 71-year-old African-American woman, it was a challenge that I willingly accepted.

Reacquainting myself with the educational landscape was a substantial task in itself. While many of my peers are settling into retirement, I am rekindling my passion for learning. But why take on such a challenge? For me, it was a God-given calling to personal growth and proving to myself that I can adapt and evolve regardless of my circumstances.

In sharing my story, I want to remind others that no challenge is too great to overcome, especially when one is willing to seek help and lean on the strength of the community. Remember, in the face of adversity, we often face a hidden fear and discover our most authentic and resilient selves.

The swift pace of technological and academic change and the initially overwhelming new learning platforms were just the tip of the iceberg.

**Beneath the surface, however, I grappled with self-doubt and a looming sense of inadequacy.**

The enormity of the challenge in front of me, combined with the pressures I placed on myself, began to take its toll. There were moments when it felt like the weight of my endeavors would push me to a breaking point. I recall nights spent in distress, feeling isolated, questioning my decision to return, and almost succumbing to the anxieties of difficulty and breakdown.

It is often said that acknowledging the need for help is a strength, not a weakness. With this in mind, I reached out to my new community and asked for assistance. This was a difficult decision, as I had always been “the helper.” However, I was provided not only with the resources I needed to facilitate my learning journey, but also the solace of a community saturated with understanding peers and supportive faculty. I learned to overcome the feeling that I didn’t belong, or wasn’t “good enough.”

So here’s my advice to you: build a support system and surround yourself with authentic community,





whether they be family, friends, or colleagues. They can provide emotional support during challenging times.

Embrace your challenges instead of avoiding them, and see them as opportunities for growth and learning. Find diverse mentors who can guide your academic journey.

**Most importantly, you must advocate for yourself.**

In sharing my story, I hope to remind others that no challenge is too great to overcome, especially when you are willing to seek support and lean on the strength of your faith and community. Now, as I reflect and continue on my academic journey, I realize that school was an escape from childhood trauma, interlocking oppressions, and economic injustices. I carry these experiences with me. They remind me of my resilience, ability to overcome, and the strength that can be found in seeking support.

Every day I spend at Boston University School of Theology (BUSTH) has become a testament to my commitment. The hallways echo with the whispers of youth, innovation, and fresh perspectives. And amongst these voices, mine has found its place, not as an echo from the past, but as a melody of joy, grace, and faithfulness.

Ultimately, my journey at BUSTH became a beacon of hope and a living testament to the idea that it's never too late to pursue one's dreams.

To those who find themselves at the crossroads of ambition and doubt, I say embrace the journey, celebrate every moment, and always believe in the power of God and second chances.

Blessings and Miracles,  
W. Pearl Wilkinson

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** W. Pearl Wilkinson is a second year Master of Theological Studies student at Boston University School of Theology. Pearl enjoys empowering and encouraging women, and is the co-founder of the Women's Power Breakfast as well as a founder of Prison Ministries and the Ladies of Vision & Excellence. She is a Certified Lay Servant and Lay Leader of the Wesley United Methodist Church in Springfield.



# From Patriarchy to Potential

## Learning to Lead By Discerning God's Call

By Dr. Jill C. Hartness

As I sit on a plane and watch others around me, I find myself looking down at each pair of shoes. I wonder about the lives of those who wear them: where they started their day and put their shoes on, and the destination that awaits them. Today I wear Veja sneakers because they get me through the airport quickly and appear somewhat hip. I rarely wear sneakers because I'm what some would call "vertically challenged."

**My Southern mother would say I'm petite and always told me I'd be thankful for that. I'm 55 years old and not thankful yet.**

I've found being short and a woman can put me at a disadvantage—a disadvantage I attempt to overcome by wearing four-inch heels—but the heels tend to prolong airport security and so, for today, sneakers.

As a woman raised in a patriarchal evangelical environment in the American South, I learned from an early age that my appearance mattered. I was praised when I presented myself as pretty and quiet, fairly invisible to the adults—primarily men doing seemingly important work. Yet God gifted me with certain abilities that thrust me into positions of leadership. Leaning

into my gifts, I often found myself organizing others and being called upon to represent groups.

Even amongst my cousins, I was the one regularly sent before the parents to ask permission for whatever caper we had concocted; I seemed to be the one with influence. Over the years I grew more comfortable with the idea of my own influence, although those around me were only comfortable with it to an extent. I was told to "Lead but not too far, speak but not too loudly, have an opinion, but not too expressive and especially not one of dissent." With every experience and every obstacle, my mind broadened to the possibilities of who I might be and what I might do. Over time I made choices which led to a college degree, a master's, working while raising children, entrepreneurship, and board service. I was still living in the privilege of my white Southern world, but doing things differently from those around me and creating a bit of discomfort because of it. But I couldn't suppress my ambition, and I liked being known for more than my appearance.

And then, unexpectedly, I began discerning a call from God to step into the Presidency of a large, Christian, K-12 institution. I recall





feeling unequipped, unprepared, and undeserving in every way. Yet the call was clear and so I answered. I accepted the job, and viewed my leadership position as a role of service. Perhaps that's why it felt so right; as a Southern evangelical woman, I had been trained to serve. The difference was that I now realized that service comes in many forms.

**I understood that service can be  
a product of empowerment,  
rather than a tool of submission.**

In my new role I was as motivated as ever, looking for ways to improve myself and everything around me. And improve we did. During my decade-long tenure, I successfully reversed every negative metric, leaving the school in its most favorable position in its 70-year history. During this time, I pursued a doctoral degree, working for my own education at night and on the weekends.

I got into a rhythm of reading, writing, and researching. I loved it, as I've always devoured learning. As I approached the finish line, I realized that my graduation would coincide with my daughter's graduation from undergrad, so I began doubling up on courses to finish early and, in my mind, not steal her thunder. Ironically, I finished in 2020 and there was no graduation to be had. Thunder unstolen.

Completing my doctorate, defending my dissertation, and leading a school during a pandemic likely led me to the end of that portion of my career.

But, it set me up for my next position—working as the Chief Advancement Officer for a Christian higher education organization in Washington, D.C.—and I believe that call from God was just as providential.

Through my experiences, I discovered that God has blessed me with unique talents and abilities, and I find the greatest sense of calling in the moments I embrace the way I was created, trust in myself, and follow the path that God has guided me towards. Perhaps, in the future, I'll exchange the four-inch heels for the satisfaction of knowing I have nothing to prove; tranquil with the knowledge that I'm precisely who I need to be, taking up space in the embodied way only I can achieve, and equipped with the certainty that God brought me here.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Dr. Jill Hartness is the Vice-President and Chief Advancement Officer for the Council of Christian Colleges & Universities in Washington, D.C.. She is passionate about advocating for and advancing Christian education. Jill is married to Jeb, and their home base is Chattanooga, TN where she enjoys baking and spending time with their pup, Winnie.



# A Feast of Learning

## Meet the Anna Howard Shaw Center Fall 2023 Lunch Lecturers

September 14th: **Dr. Choi and the Shaw Center Staff** hosted a Beginning of Semester Check-In.

September 21st: **Shea Thompson** presented on what he's learned from his mother's and grandmother's confidence.

September 28th: **Cynthia N. Perry** spoke on confidence within the realm of nonprofit work at Black Sports Ministry Network, where she serves as Executive Director.

October 5th: **BUSTH Theology Library Staff** gave a presentation on the "Hidden Treasures" within the Theology Library.



October 12th: **Ajet Hosea Ishaya** lectured on totems: what they mean and why they are essential.

October 19th: **Sandra Barrios** spoke on "The Underground Goddess and The Lost Feathered Headdress."

October 26th: **Stacey Duran** presented on Mujerista theology



resources at BUSTH.

November 2nd: **Dr. Choi and the Shaw Center Staff** hosted a Mid-Semester Check-In.

November 9th: **Aixin Yi** presented a brief lecture on and enlightening demonstration of Tai Chi.

November 16th: **Amy Russian** presented a lecture on "The Side Door Entrance to Confidence."

November 30th: **Debbie Brubaker** spoke on the power of friendship as a pathway to confidence.

December 7th: **Chris Schlauch** lectured on "Paradigms of Racism: The Ignorance They Hide, The Harm They Sustain."



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VOL. 41

FALL NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1

## THANKS FOR READING!

**Managing Editor:** Dr. Choi Hee An

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**Need a book recommendation?** Check out what our writers are reading!

**Krista's reading:**

*The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster

**Aixin's reading:**

*The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* by Henri Nouwen

**Pearl's reading:**

*Being Peace* by Thich Nhat Hanh

**Jill's reading:**

*Deep Run Roots: Stories and Recipes From My Corner of the South* by Vivian Howard

**Looking forward:**

The AHSC Women In The World Conference

Each spring, the Anna Howard Shaw Center is proud to host the annual Women in the World Conference. This year the conference will take place at the Boston University School of Theology on April 10, 2024. The theme of this year's conference is Women and Confidence. Be on the lookout for more details to follow.

We hope to see you there!

