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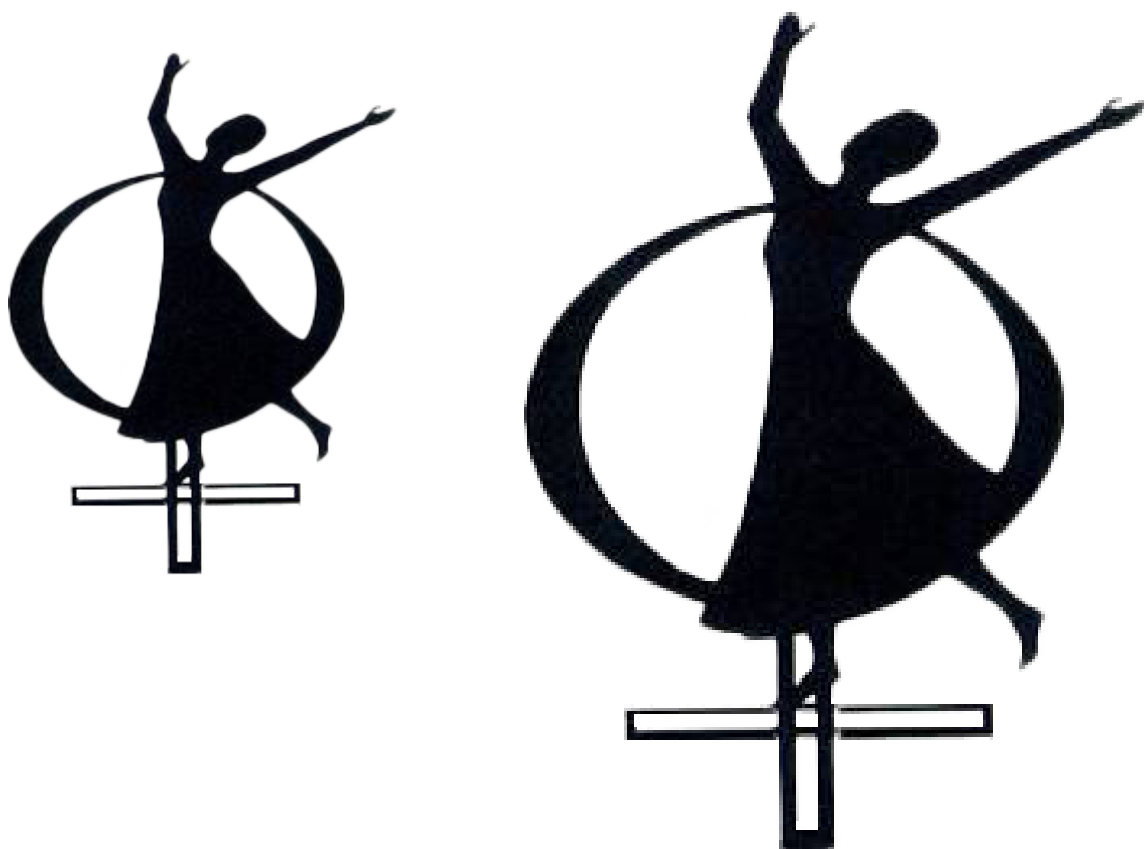
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Boston University School of Theology

ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

Volume 42 Issue 1 Fall 2024

ENCOUNTERING BELOVED COMMUNITY: DIS/ABILITY COLLECTIVES



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HELLO FROM THE ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER

3

Friends of the Anna Howard Shaw Center at Boston University School of Theology,

As the pages of this newsletter show, the Anna Howard Shaw Center was abuzz with activity this autumn across the many events and activities we host. From our weekly Thursday Lunch Lecture Series to our Annual Multicultural Exposition, we at the Anna Howard Shaw Center remain steadfast in our commitments to promote gender equality and create a safe, supportive, and affirming community for all in support of women/femme students and alumni. Our center even underwent a few design updates, brightening up our space to help students find a moment of serenity in their day.

As we rejoice in our semester's highlights, we recognize the increasing needs of our students and the Boston University community, and feel the critical importance of the Shaw Center's role even more. As you may have noticed, expenses have also increased including more equitable pay for our student staff and rising event costs. Student need for our Spiritual Growth & Stress Support Group program, which provides safe and confidential personal, academic, and vocational support, is higher than ever. As you know, we have worked collaboratively with the Danielsen Institute's counseling center on this program for almost 20 years. Due to a shortage of counselors and financial challenges at the Danielsen Institute, they now ask us to pay an annual honorarium for the licensed counselor who co-leads this group with Dr. Choi. The Danielsen Institute has been very gracious in working with us without an honorarium over the past twenty years, but now that the tide has shifted, your financial support is key to sustaining this program for years to come.

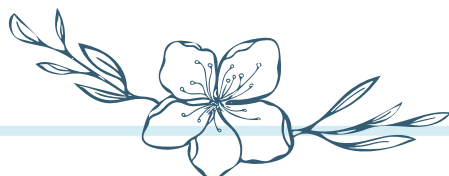
Thanks to your generous donations, we have been able to thrive in our mission to support students who benefit from the Center's programs. As we encounter these new financial challenges, your continued generosity is more important than ever. Your renewed gifts help us to maintain this vital ministry to women/femme students and alumni, support our mission, provide resources, create new programming, and foster a supportive and empowering environment for all.

We hope you will include us in your prayers and giving as we approach the end of this calendar year. If you feel so moved, we invite you to make a gift online at <https://ishortn.ink/givingshawcenter> or by check payable to "Trustees of Boston University" with "STH- Shaw Center" in the memo field mailed to:

Boston University
Gift Processing
c/o JPMorgan Chase & Co.
PO Box 22605
New York, NY 10087-2605

We deeply thank you for your continued partnership and support in making a difference in the lives of everyone we serve here at the Anna Howard Shaw Center. We wish you and those dear to you a very Merry Christmas and a blessed New Year!

Sincerely,
The Anna Howard Shaw Center, Boston University School of Theology



Thank you!



This year on October 24th, 2024, the Anna Howard Shaw Center hosted our annual multicultural expo with great excitement and joy. This event was an opportunity for the STH community to learn and celebrate our multicultural differences. This year, our presenters represented the nations of Nigeria, Indonesia, Ghana, India, and Colombia.

We started off the evening by gathering with plates of food and a blessing offered by Dean Sujin Pak before beginning our presentations for the evening with a presentation about Nigeria from Rev. Mustard Uzu (3rd year MDiv student). Introducing us to how to say “good morning” in Eastern Nigeria among the Igbo tribe with *Utoto Oma-utoto Oma*, and in Western Nigeria among the Yoruba tribe with *Ekaaro-Ekaro*, he described how important it is to have this greeting for the sake of communal well-being. Rev. Mustard also reminded us of the achievements of popular Nigerians in the world, including a shout-out to our very own Dr. Nimi Wariboko!

Our next group was a lively collaborative presentation about Indonesia by Dimitri Januar Bawole (1st year MTS student), Elsayinda Pulamau (1st year MTS), Sanne Pingak (1st year MTS), Ujun Junaedi (1st year MTS), and Medyatry Rafael (2nd year MTS student).

The students all sang their national anthem, “Dari Sabang Sampai Merauke” (From Sabang to Merauke) together complete with accompaniment from Ujun on guitar. Student presenters also taught us a bit about Bahasa Indonesia by shouting the word *cakep* (awesome/nice) to ourselves. They shared that the phrases “asking how are you?” and “have you eaten?” are identical, reflecting how it is as important to ensure the wellbeing of our neighbors as it is to have food on the table for daily survival. *Cakep!*



Rev. Mustard Uzu, 3rd Year MDiv

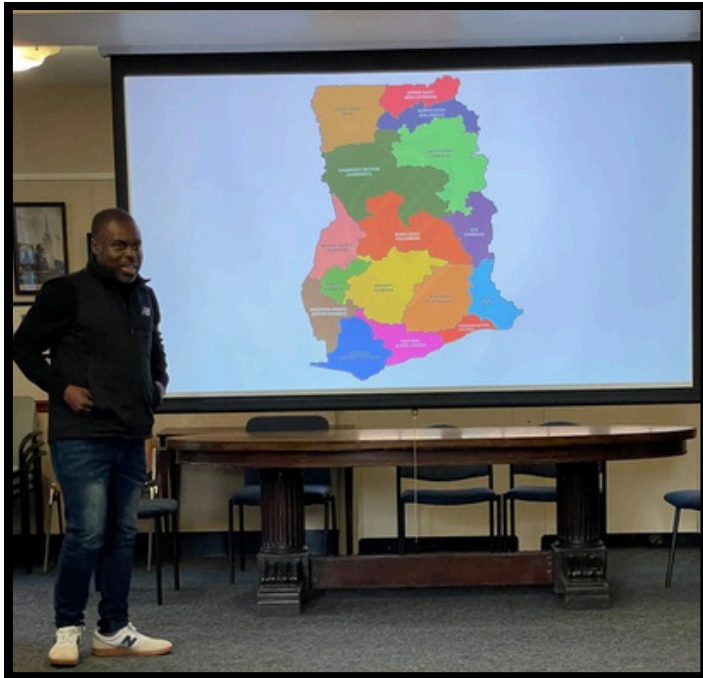


Dimitri Januar Bawole, Sanne Pingak, Elsayinda Pulamau, and Ujun Junaedi

Scan this QR Code to watch our Indonesian students sing!

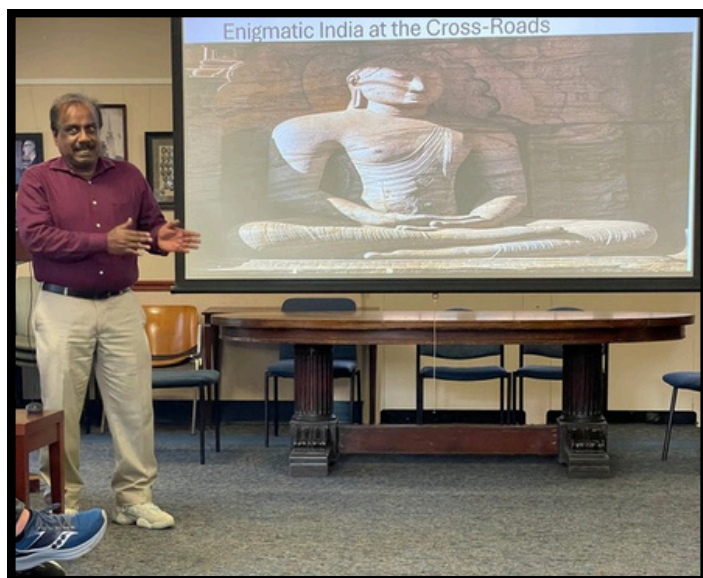


This presentation was especially unique in that all ten School of Theology students from Indonesia were involved. Even those who were not able to attend this year's multicultural expo in person shared photos of their faces on a map overlaid with their hometowns to show just how large and diverse the country of Indonesia is, with its 17,000 islands and over 700 languages. The presentation wrapped up with another joyful rendition of a popular song, "Rasa sayange."



Bright Einstein Nogoh
2nd Year MDiv

Next up was Bright Einstein Nogoh (2nd year MDiv student), who offered a presentation about his home country of Ghana. His presentation featured the importance of Adinkra symbols and explanations of their meanings, as well as a description of geography and the meaning behind the Ghanaian flag. Bright also shared photos of clothing that is typically worn, with photos that feature him with his own students back home. His presentation closed out with sharing a music video called, "Woyaye (We Are Going)" by Wiyaala. Attendees swayed to the music and especially enjoyed getting to hear it. I am sure many of us found a new favorite song to add to our playlists!



Premkumar Immanuel Clement
3rd Year MDiv

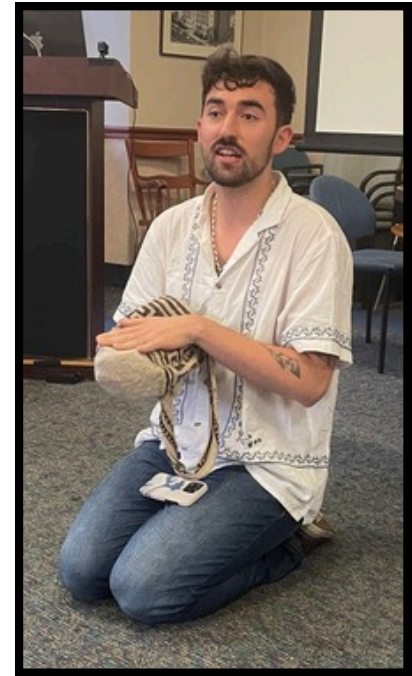
Premkumar Immanuel Clement (3rd year MDiv student) shared next, offering a comprehensive overview entitled, "Enigmatic India at the Cross-Roads" replete with photos and a detailed political, economic, and cultural analysis of the challenges India faces into the mid-21st century. Attendees especially enjoyed the plethora of photos that Prem shared, creating a powerful visual experience as he discussed the joys and challenges of reconciling India's history and political structures with the bright possibilities of the future.



Our final presenter of the evening was Diego Garrido Barreto (3rd year MDiv student) who invited us into a heartfelt shared somatic practice to consider all the things we carry with us, centered around his hand-made *mochila* (backpack) from Colombia. He shared the ways in which it has been a meaningful object for him. Diego then invited all of us to rise, and he led us in a series of movements to release tension and consider mindfully what we might be carrying in our own metaphorical mochilas as a spiritual practice.

We closed out the night with karaoke! The whole room rang out with song, belting out the words to John Denver's hit "Country Roads," a tune that felt familiar to nearly all present in the room due to the global popularity it has achieved over the years. By singing this song together, we all yearn for our journey to take us home to the place we belong together. What a fun and joyful way to end the evening!

We at the Anna Howard Shaw Center are deeply grateful to all our presenters and to everyone who attended this year. We experienced the richness of global communal cultures and recognized the values of our differences and similarities in presence. We look forward to seeing you all next year!



*Diego Garrido Barreto
3rd Year MDiv*



SACRED FRIENDSHIP

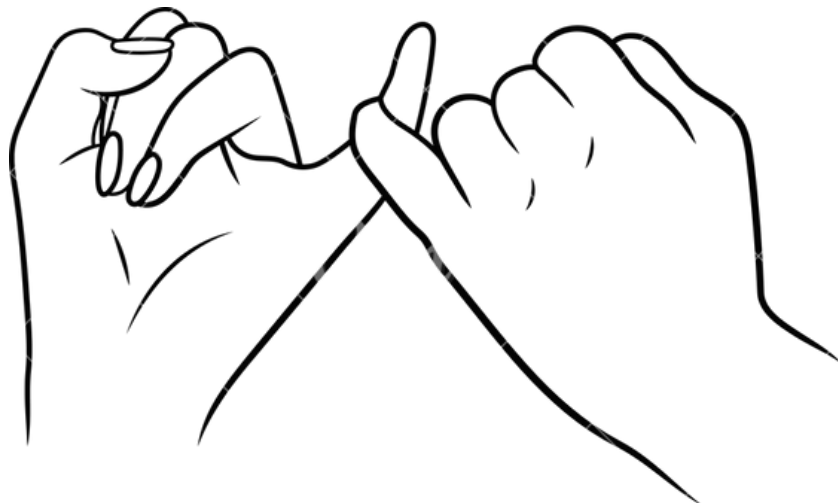
JALISSA SNYDER

Friends are integral to our lives and foundational in building a community of love and acceptance. Friends help us navigate tricky terrain as we travel on this human journey. We generally begin to understand friendship in early childhood and those experiences shape how we understand compassion and unity.

As a child, I wanted to be friends with everyone, but I was a little different. I spent a lot of time in the hospital and required extensive therapy. I suppose it was only natural that my first friends were also different. Some of them wore helmets and some sat in wheelchairs. Some of my friends spoke and some did not, but the depth of our friendship did not lie in speech, but rather in our love and tenderness for each other. Compassion danced between our fingertips and love lingered in the expanse between us as we shared sacred space.

As we grew, my time in our learning areas was cut short as I defied expectations and moved into classrooms that barely challenged me, but I never forgot my time with my first friends. Their friendship transmuted into angelic love, for when I was lonesome, I sought that tenderness in angels, who surrounded me with their unending love.

I wanted to be friends with God, but as I grew, I found myself raging at God. Although I knew that God loved me as I was, the proposed idea that we would all be made perfect in some paradise or heaven seemed to contradict this idea. I was already crafted perfectly in God's image, so either God screwed up or everyone was wrong. Yet, if everyone was wrong, where were perfectly imperfect people in the Bible? Where were my first friends?



SACRED FRIENDSHIP (CONT'D)

JALISSA SNYDER

I despised the idea that I should have to wait to be made perfect. My body and brain were “broken” but I loved them because they had shaped me into the person I was becoming. If the people were right, I argued, then God was a joke, a farce, a scam. All that was real was love but humans view life through an imperfect lens. It is easier to wish for some distant hopeful future than to face the difficult task of finding perfect love in dark times. Humans get angry and rage, but they also keep a hope alive that is fueled by a deep love that runs through them, an unconditional love that is God.

As I moved through my theological studies and read through the Letters of John, I saw the community behind the Johannine texts in the New Testament also dealt with dark times, but they held God’s love in their hearts. They sought to love each other and create a community with love. They spoke of a teacher who sought to break down barriers and embrace everyone with love, in spite, or perhaps because of their differences. A slight reframing illuminated the texts as I finally understood that my first friends were there in the Bible, hidden and protected by a community that fostered God’s love. In the Gospel of John, I challenged the healings, but with a renewed translation, I found an advocate and friend of those who were disabled, who praised the ones who demonstrated faith and love in friendship and community.

Sometimes building a strong community feels difficult but it often starts in a friendship formed in seeking an unconditional divine love in each other mixed with a raw acceptance of each other’s human flaws. Friendship grows in the sacred space between each other and flourishes in compassion and gentle tenderness for each other, where we can be perfectly imperfect and held in the divine love that we all carry within.



Jalissa Snyder (STH MDiv. '24) is pursuing their PhD at University of Aberdeen with a focus on Disability and Theology. Involved with the Center of Autism and Theology (CAT), their thesis focuses on Intellectual and Developmental Disorders (especially Autism and ADHD) in the New Testament, specifically arguing for an inclusive Johannean community.



NEW BEATITUDES

EMILY LITTERER

My theology has developed through relationships and through reading the writings of Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, Nancy Eiesland, Sara Hendren, Rabbi Elliot Kukla, Jane Eaton Hamilton, and others. They challenge me to expand my theology to include those who are often not visible, who sit, lay, and stim on the margins of society. Those who can't leave their houses, cannot access the coffee shops and churches that I can, those who are avoided because they look, sound or act too different.

There is a phrase in the disability community that goes, “nothing about us, without us.” Which means that disability theology cannot be defined or created without disabled people. Nancy Eiesland, author of *The Disabled God*, wrote, “These new embodied categories arise from the concrete experiences of people with disabilities. For this reason, the specific stories of people with disabilities are prerequisites for a liberatory theology of disability. I believe that the patients I met at McLean all have stories that are the prerequisites for a liberatory theology of disability.

My idea of disability theology is largely influenced by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and her book, *Care Work*. Her book outlines her dreams of a fully accessible “crippled” future, where people do not have to accommodate to an ableist world, but where people of all abilities are valued and treated as equally deserving of dignity.

When I think of my patients I think of a world that does not shame people for their substance use disorder. I think of a world that is not scared of psychosis. A fully accessible world would be one that comes close to people with mental illness and cares for them through their relapse, psychotic break, or debilitating depression. I keep thinking of one didactic from the summer on the topic of psychosis. The words of one of the presenters have stayed with me, he said, “What if we brought a casserole to someone experiencing a psychotic break, just as we bring a casserole to someone in cancer treatment?” Even in the world of disability, some disabilities are more “normal” or acceptable than others. People tend to relate to or at least feel compassion for those going through chemotherapy, while people with substance use disorder are often avoided, chastised, and even blamed for their disorder.

My New Beatitudes are adapted from those attributed to Andre Masse C.S.E. that we read often throughout my time at L'arche Tahoma Hope. Usually when volunteer groups would visit we would share the poem as an introduction to our community. At the end of my Summer CPE unit at McLean Mental Health Hospital, an experience that shaped how I see my role as a chaplain and influenced my theology, I wrote the following *Beatitudes of the Mentally Ill* based on specific interactions I had this summer with people on my units.



NEW BEATITUDES (CONT'D)

EMILY LITTERER

10

Beatitudes of the Mentally Ill

BLESSED ARE YOU who do not call us crazy when we tell you that we have superpowers, for the line between insanity and genius is thin.

BLESSED ARE YOU who sit with our grief and pain, and do not ask us to feel less, for often the substances have been numbing years of hurt.

BLESSED ARE YOU who stop to smile or talk, for often people are too busy to wait for our labored, monotone voices.

BLESSED ARE YOU who challenge what is “normal,” for often we feel pressure to meet unreasonable, self-imposed expectations.

BLESSED ARE YOU who know we can make our own decisions and take part in our treatment, for often we are told to leave it to the expert.

BLESSED ARE YOU who interject our rapid storytelling to connect for a moment, for mania can often feel isolating.

BLESSED ARE YOU who listen to our guilt and tell us that we are loved and forgiven, for our shame can feel so heavy.

BLESSED ARE YOU who affirm our self-worth, for there are too many voices saying otherwise.

BLESSED ARE YOU who do not shy away from our desires to die, for it is in the connection with living beings that we find meaning to live.

REJOICE AND BE EXCEEDINGLY GLAD for a “cripped” world is possible. A world where we are not avoided, ostracized, or judged but instead met with compassion and understanding because we too are human.



Emily Litterer (M.Div., '25) was raised in Portland, OR. Before returning to academia Emily worked as a campus minister at Seattle University and then as the employment specialist at L'arche Tahoma Hope where she supported people with intellectual disabilities to sustain meaningful work. Emily focuses her studies at STH on religion and conflict transformation, with an emphasis on ecological justice. Upon completion of her M.Div, she hopes to be accepted into a residency for hospital chaplaincy. She currently works as a Graduate Assistant for the Faith and Ecological Justice Certificate at STH and as the director of Rainbow Youth Alliance in Milton, MA.



LET US BE TOGETHER AND FEEL

LAUREL OBERSTADT-PETRIK

The etymology of the word commiseration literally suggests feeling passion or misery with others. Friends, there are so many feelings these days. Anger, grief, rage, numbness, love, ambition, terror....the list goes on. And I believe with my whole self that it is important to feel those feelings. What I believe even more powerfully is that we need to feel those feelings together. There is resistance to empire in the embrace of our emotions in community. Empire (the powers and principalities of this world, the toxic interlocking systems of oppression) numbs, it seeks apathy and indifference. Let us resist numbness, the deadening of our hearts and spirits. Let us be together and feel.

But what does this look like? It looks like community potlucks where people hold each other in the love of a gathered space and talk about their emotions and their plans for action. It looks like the STH community singing the words “I need you to survive” to each other as we looked one another directly in the eyes, and crying at Wednesday Worship in Marsh Chapel. It looks like, “I am here, with you.” It is being-with and being-for.

Being-with and being-for is the mantra of the community I wish to inhabit. We are with one another, and we are for one another. The exact delineations of what that means are not immediately clear, because nothing is exact when it comes to community. There are manifold iterations of what community looks like. But when we imagine a future for ourselves, I want us to imagine a future where we are with and for one another.

To be with is to practice presence. To be present to the moment in which we find ourselves, the people with which we find ourselves. We must avoid the distractions, the things that pull us away from the people with whom we are practicing presence. Like all practices, presence and being with is not something that we are immediately perfect at, nor is it something that will come easily and stay easy. When we practice presence though, we practice showing up, the art of continuity. Our capacity may wane, but we keep showing up to be with the people we love. How do you show up? How are you with the ones you love and the ones you do not yet love?

To be for is to sit with the people with whom you are gathered in community. It means listening deeply and carefully, setting aside preconceived notions of what may be correct. It means accepting that you may be wrong. When you are for someone, you put yourself in their position, as much as possible, and you listen into the gap between where you find yourself and where they are sitting. In what ways can you be on the side of the people you are in community with? What might that look like?

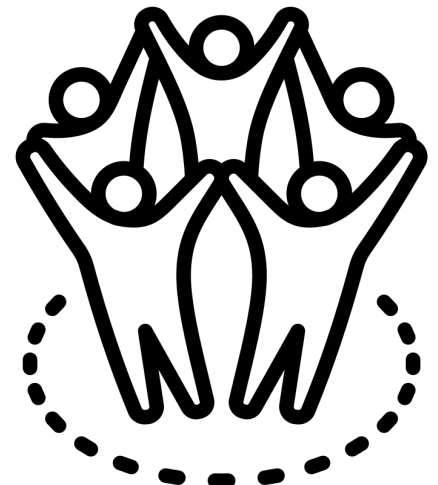
What are you feeling?

Who are you sitting with?

How do you imagine yourself on the side of your community, being-with and being-for?



Laurel Oberstadt-Petrik (MDiv, '26) enjoys spontaneous trips to mossy forests filled with soft light to capture natural beauty with their camera. They are a photographer, fiber artist, seminarian, and delighted cat owner. Laurel is attending BU School of Theology to get their Master of Divinity, where they study queer potlucks as liturgy and serve on the executive board of the student government. In their spare time, you can find them napping.



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Dr. Choi
Hee An.

TOPIC:
Welcome
to a New
Semester!



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Rev. Rachel
Barton.

TOPIC:
Courage in
Community:
Building
Vulnerable
Spaces



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Rev. Patrice
Rose

TOPIC:
Paving the Way
with Courage
and Resilience:
Women in
Military
Chaplaincy



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Terra Frederick-
Kirby

TOPIC:
How to Be a
Closer: Saying
No, Break Ups
and Complaints



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Rev. Dr.
Emilie M.
Townes

TOPIC:
Ask Me!



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Trinki
Brueckner

TOPIC:
Courage,
Vulnerability,
and
Forgiveness



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
BUSTH Library
Staff

TOPIC:
Things you
might not
know about
the Theology
Library



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Rev. Dr.
Charlotte
Pridgen
Randolph

TOPIC:
Deepen Your
Spirituality



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Rev. Dr.
Choi, Hee
An

TOPIC:
Let's Talk!



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUEST:
Dzidzor Azaglo

TOPIC:
Listening
Session: "We
are already
born, we are
going to die."



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

GUESTS:
Aixin Yi & Greta
Frei

TOPIC:
Liu Hsia's Song
of Life: A
Taiwanese
Christian
Woman's Fight
for Disability
Rights.



Anna Howard Shaw Center

FREE LUNCH LECTURE

Every Thursday
@12:30pm
in STH 320

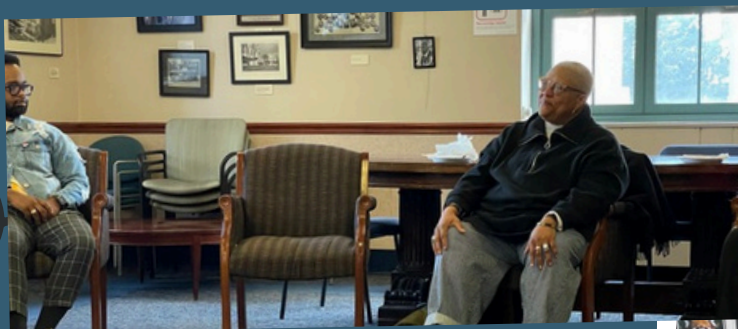
GUEST:
Christine Hill

TOPIC:
Collaborative
Storytelling:
Navigating the
Tension and Joy
of Creative
Teamwork



Thank you to all
speakers and attendees
this semester! We are
so grateful for your
wisdom and insight!







Rev. Dr. Emilie Townes (she/her/hers)
Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Religion and Black Studies

Emilie M. Townes, an American Baptist clergywoman, is a native of Durham, North Carolina. She holds a Doctor of Ministry degree from the University of Chicago Divinity School and a PhD in Religion in Society and Personality from Northwestern University. A prolific author of the groundbreaking work *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, her most recent co-editorship is with Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Alison Gise Johnson, and Angela Sims for *Walking Through the Valley: Essays: Womanist Explorations in the Spirit of Katie Geneva Cannon* (2022). She is the Dean Emerita and the former University Distinguished Professor of Womanist Ethics and Society at Vanderbilt University Divinity School and the College of Arts and Science, becoming the first African American to serve as Dean of the Divinity School in 2013. She is also the former Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale University Divinity School. She was the first African American and first woman to serve as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the Yale Divinity School. She is the former Carolyn Williams Beaird Professor of Christian Ethics at Union Theological Seminary and Professor of Social Ethics at Saint Paul School of Theology. Townes was elected a Fellow in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2009. She became the first Black woman to serve as president of the American Academy of Religion in 2008, and served a four-year term as president of the Society for the Study of Black Religion from 2012 to 2016. In 2022, Townes was elected to the presidential line of the Society of Christian Ethics. Her presidential year will be 2025. At that time, she will be the first Black woman to hold this office.



Erica Johnson (she/her/hers)

Adjunct Instructor of Organ

Erica joins the faculty of BU from Wellesley College, where she has served as College Organist and Instructor of Organ and Harpsichord since 2019. Erica currently serves as Director of Liturgy and Music at Sacred Heart Parish in Newton, MA. In addition to her position at Wellesley, Erica has taught at the UNC School of the Arts, Salem College, and the Oberlin Conservatory. She has held many church positions over the years, including as Organ Scholar at the Memorial Church of Harvard University from 1999–2001.



Rev. Alicia Vélez Stewart (she/her/jella)

Adjunct Instructor

Alicia is an Ordained Elder in the New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church currently serving as pastor of Weston United Methodist Church and summer camp chaplain at Camp Aldersgate. A Latina of Puerto Rican heritage, Rev. Vélez Stewart has a passion for inclusive ministry, and is a fierce advocate for social justice and community engagement. She holds a Master of Divinity from Boston University School of Theology and has a deep commitment to fostering vibrant, fully-inclusive communities in the local church and beyond.



May Hartness (she/her/hers)

Senior Program Coordinator for the Office of Registration and Financial Aid

As a graduate of the Boston University School of Theology, May was excited to become part of an empathetic and supportive Student Services Team that prioritizes students' wellbeing alongside their academic success. In her current role, May is grateful to have the opportunity to support students as they engage with the BTI, as well as provide a listening ear for those interested in scholarship eddying outside mainstream constructs of religion.



Rebekah Neuberger (she/her/hers)

Senior Administrative Coordinator for Online & Hybrid Programs

Rebekah is equal parts honored and delighted to be a part of BU STH's administrative staff. Before receiving her Master of Divinity from STH, Rebekah graduated with a degree in English Literature from Wheaton College. In her work alongside Dr. Debbie Brubaker to support the school's distance and hybrid learning community, she hopes to be a part of continuing the same compassionate and progressive spirit she has experienced as a part of the STH community and admires so much.



Sara Taylor (she/her/hers)

Financial Aid Officer & Advanced Studies Coordinator

Currently a part-time Master of Divinity student, Sara expects to graduate in May of 2025. Sara has previously worked at a Wesley Foundation and has experience working at the university or community college level in residence life, research, online learning, disability services, first-generation assistance, student activities, and library services. Her undergraduate degree is in sociology with a concentration in social welfare and a minor in communication studies.



ANNA HOWARD SHAW CENTER NEWSLETTER

Volume 42, Issue 1 Fall 2024

MANAGING EDITOR

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EDITOR

Kelsy Hillesheim

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