WOMEN AND THE WORD 2004: THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY
Rebecca Clark

The twentieth annual Women and the Word Conference convened March 24 in the Photonics Center at Boston University. Fifteen previous presenters returned to Women and the Word to lead the anniversary event: "Celebrating the Past, Honoring the Present, Envisioning the Future." More than eighty registered participants enjoyed the wisdom of these women. The leaders spoke in panels on Wednesday and Thursday on the history of the women's movement and the power of women in today's church and the church of the future.

The Reverend Rosemary Brown began the first panel, "Celebrating the Past," with her life's scripture, sharing her stories of her first funeral (given for a pet chicken in her schoolyard), and her struggles as a pioneer in the women's movement. A United Methodist elder and native of Tennessee, Brown demonstrated her love for worship, education, and service in the stories she shared as she celebrated the unique and wonderful experience that is women's ministry.

The Reverend Hea Sun Kim, also a United Methodist clergywoman, is a member of the Women's Division of the General Board of Global Ministries. She continued the story of women in ministry, reflecting on her first experience leading Women and the Word and the anger she felt at that time, nearly a decade and a half ago. Kim commented that the past is not isolated, but a part of the present and something we reshape as we move toward the future.

Dr. Mary Hunt, a Roman Catholic feminist theologian, is the cofounder and codirector of the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual. Reflecting during the past twenty years. Many familiar faces attended the conference, and we all celebrated our journey together.

Twenty years! Those years represent a long and sincere commitment to women's preaching, teaching, leadership, and service. Because of this sincere commitment, the Anna Howard Shaw Center has been a great part of the wonderful women's "herstory" in ministry. What a great journey we have had! It has been rich and beautiful.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR
Hee An Choi, Director

In Korean proverbs, ten years changes rivers and mountains, I believe that the Women and the Word Conference has changed the face of women's preaching and ministry twice already because we hosted the twentieth anniversary of the Women and the Word event this year. Our theme was "Celebrating the Past, Honoring the Present, and Envisioning the Future." The Anna Howard Shaw Center invited fifteen guest speakers from previous events and listened to how their struggles have been challenging and transforming for themselves and for others during the past twenty years. Many familiar faces attended the conference, and we all celebrated our journey together.

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on the past ten years, she highlighted the progress churches have made and lamented the places where churches have not risen to the challenge. Hunt encouraged her listeners to maintain and strengthen the work of feminist scholarship, and outlined three areas of hope for the future: our strong past that informs our journey, the children of this multifaith world who encourage us to think globally, and the young women of today who—with training and inspiration—will be the leaders of tomorrow.

The panel concluded with Dr. Lorraine Brugh, a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and Assistant Professor of Music at Valparaiso University. Brugh serves on the E.L.C.A.'s Renewing Worship project as a member of the Resource Proposal Committee and the Liturgical Music Committee.

After a worship service in Marsh Chapel, the Wednesday afternoon panel, "Honoring the Present," began with The Reverend Dr. Heather Murray Elkins. An elder in the United Methodist Church, Elkins is the Associate Professor of Worship and Liturgical Studies at Drew Theological School and is widely known for her work in worship, prayer, women's studies, and the arts. Elkins presented a multimedia show encouraging her viewers to preserve Word, wholeness, and holiness by perceiving, receiving, conceiving, and delivering the Word alive. She stressed the importance of particularity and diversity in preaching, practicing ministry with all God's people, worship worthy of God's beloved, remembering into the future, and giving God joy. Elkins challenged those present: "Don't ever underestimate what the Spirit might be about!"

Her presentation was followed by The Reverend Dr. Sue Davies, a pastor in the United Church of Christ, long-term seminary professor, and feminist theologian. Davies recalled her life's journey through which she came to feel a sense of belonging as "part of the beautiful diversity of church life." She described the silencing of herself that she faced as a divorced person, a woman, and a lesbian, reflecting that she had once asked herself, "What if they really knew? Would they listen to the Gospel from a vessel such as me?" Further, she noted, women bring their sexuality to the pulpit, whether they intend to or not, an aspect of feminine leadership that is disconcerting or threatening to many men. The situation has improved, however. The silenced voices of women such as herself, Davies celebrated, have been amplified and become "a symphony of beauty in the world."

The Reverend Unzu Lee, an ordained minister and the Coordinator of Women's Advocacy in the Presbyterian Church (USA), spoke about word and silence. Lee reflected that silence can be extremely valuable if exercised by choice; it can be an act of resistance, reflection, or waiting for justice. We must never be silenced by others, however, and must be free to speak the truth for ourselves and articulate new vision. Lee reminded her listeners that speech is a privilege and we must all exercise this privilege in ways that help—rather than hurt—others. She used a Korean saying, describing the unnatural and dangerous nature of women's voices, to illustrate her point: "When a hen crows, the house falls," Lee objected, but cautioned that when women speak, they must enflish the Word so that it cannot be co-opted. "When we crow," she challenged, "we'd better lay eggs."

The panel concluded with Bishop Susan Hassinger, United Methodist Bishop of New England Annual Conference and president of the JustPeace Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation. Hassinger reminded the participants that focusing on the future prevents us from becoming fractured, but that we must also reference the past in anticipation of the future. She spoke of the contemporary world as a world in continuous struggle for transformation against evil and injustice, a world that must hear a word of peace and hope. Hassinger urged her listeners to seek transformation through academic, devotional, and prayerful encounter with scripture; through music, worship, and Eucharist; and through working in the community to dismantle racism and white privilege.

On Wednesday afternoon Women and the Word participants selected workshops. Topics included liturgical dance, self care, spiritual direction, inclusiveness in the church, pastoring difficult persons, worship and rhetoric, and narrative preaching.

Thursday morning began with the third panel, "Envisioning the Future." Dr. Virginia Mollenkott gave a presentation that reflected her three decades of activism for human equality. Professor Emerita at William Paterson University, Mollenkott challenged the assumption that the Christian church alone possesses the key to salvation, citing it as a barrier to true solidarity. She reminded us that all language for God is metaphorical and equally valid. Mollenkott also challenged the socially assumed, constructed, and exaggerated differences between men and women. She argued instead in favor of an omnigender society, one that challenges confining gender roles and respects every benign sexual orientation. After all, Mollenkott urged, "What God has made clean you shall not deem profane." She encouraged her listeners to question what the Creator has done and rushing to fix her mistakes. "Apparently, the Creator likes diversity a whole lot more than most people!"

Following Mollenkott's presentation, The Reverend Yong Ja Kim described the racism
and sexism she has faced, barriers that challenged her to grow. A United Methodist elder and the first Korean woman to serve as pastor at her predominantly Korean church, Kim established "Women Church" while serving as a missionary to her homeland, South Korea. She spoke of the blessing of diversity that America has received, and the subsequent challenge to find reconciliation and harmony. Kim also described the difficulty of boundary-crossing, meeting God in the moments of conflict and transformation. She spoke of racial conflict and her status caught between white people and "persons of color," and reminded her listeners that transformation is painful and tearful. She celebrated, however, that "tears gave me a new perspective, and a new horizon, and a new paradigm." This transformative work—dismantling racism and the power of majority groups—must continue.

Closing the panel, Bishop Susan Morrison of the Troy and Wyoming Conferences of the United Methodist Church invited us to "dance with delight" in the presence of new melodies. She warned that the creedal and doctrinal formulas of the Christian bodies often become means of exclusion, and that there is a disconnect between what the churches teach and what people experience and live. Morrison called for us to look for God's presence in the world with excitement, rather than defending ourselves from change with "wallowing judgmentalism." She challenged churches to move beyond the smoke screen of sexuality and deal instead with the painful, pervasive problems of white privilege and the growing economic disparity in our nation and our world.

Morrison's comments, along with those of the panel, sparked a lively discussion among the participants about white racism, white privilege, and reverse racism. In a context where the power of majority and minority groups is changing, panelists and participants examined the challenges and the fears of "balancing the scales" rather than "turning the tables."

The final panel, "The Power of Women to Affect Change," convened Thursday afternoon with the Reverend Dr. Lynne Westfield. A permanent deacon in the United Methodist Church, Westfield is Assistant Professor of Religious Education at Drew University. In her presentation she examined strategies of liberation and justice using parables as a strategy for liberation. Westfield described the radical hospitality of her mother, who invited her children's white teachers to share meals in her home, whether the children liked it or not. This action, Westfield said, was intentionally subversive, just as civil rights activists such as Rosa Parks were intentionally—not accidentally—revolutionary. Westfield held up the power of hospitality and truth telling to affect change and invited those present to "hear with new ears and see with new eyes."

United Church of Christ pastor and chaplain The Reverend Valerie Haven spoke about her work in a ministry she founded called the Protestant Guild for the Blind. Haven described her discovery of power as thinking about what it means to be a woman first, rather than what it means to be blind first. This brought her to an examination of the power and skill of creativity, and from that perspective she was able to look at the healing stories in the Gospels from the perspective of the people being healed. Haven noted that the person with disability already knew who Jesus was, and experienced healing not in the act of crucifixion, but from the heart-opening perspective of the Reign of God on earth. She also spoke about finding power and love in all life's experiences—especially in the most painful. These experiences inform our understandings of humility and the transformative power of love.

The Reverend Aida Irizarry-Fernandez, District Superintendent of the Boston Metro District of the United Methodist Church's New England Annual Conference, delivered her lecture on March 26 and led a discussion following the luncheon. The Reverend Dr. Carter Heyward, the Howard Chandler Robbins Professor of Theology at Episcopal Divinity School, led the lecture and study on April 23.

Lecture series participants have provided excellent feedback and are excited about the opportunity to encounter new perspectives and interpretations of scripture. The next three lectures will take place September 24, October 8, and November 12 at the School of Theology. Cheryl Gilkes, Elizabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, and Kwok Pui Lan will lead. For more information about these exciting studies, please contact the Shaw Center.
graceful friends—not servants—of Jesus. Fernandez concluded: “Power does not lie in what women can do but in what women can be.”

The final speaker at Women and the Word 2004 was Dr. June Goudy, a celebrated author and ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Goudy focused her presentation on change rather than power, reminding her listeners that change happens in our own lives. Change, she said, is organic, natural, unpredictable, and unavoidable; we either change or we die in many ways. Goudy spoke of interplay, the wisdom of the body, stating, “Imagination is molecular, not cerebral.” Every cell in our bodies carries who we are, our sexuality, emotions, and intellect. Goudy challenged us to get through tears and fears and pain to get to possibility and the truth when we meet life’s struggles and betrayals. The power of naming truth and of imagination, she said, lies in “seeing more, saying yes, and embracing hope.”

No description of Women and the Word would be complete without mention of the powerful worship services, when the ideas of inspiration, vision, embodiment, and struggle became part of the worshiping experience of the Body. The service Wednesday afternoon—designed by students at the School of Theology—presented the rich history of women in the church and envisioned a future church body through dance, music, and congregational participation. The closing worship service, organically compiled by conference participants, focused on honoring the lives of women yesterday, today and tomorrow.

The twentieth anniversary Women and the Word event was truly a celebration of the women’s movement, women in ministries, and the hope we all hold for the future.

From the Director
Continued from page 1

Celebrating and honoring our rich legacy, now the Anna Howard Shaw Center is searching for our future; our new possibilities. That search has not been easy, however. There are many questions that we have to ask and answer: Who are we now? Where are we now? What do we need now? How can we honor and carry on this great legacy now? How can we help women’s ministry in this society now?

After Women and the Word, the Shaw Center had an opportunity to talk about our Women and the Word worship service with many Boston University School of Theology community members in a conversation titled “The power of symbols in multicultural and multiethnic contexts.” Using our worship service experience to illustrate the challenges of inclusive worship and ministry, we brought our attention to multicultural and multiethnic ministry in the real world. We tasted the living complex world. We envisioned the future of ministry in this “already but not yet” context. We learned to see the multicultural and multiethnic struggles of our reality. We learned to understand and dialogue with the diverse communities present and see the needs of multicultural ministry. During this process of learning, we found some questions that we have to ask for our future ministry: How can we envision future ministry in this multicultural reality? What are the risks or tasks that women have to take in these contexts? What are the different contexts that women have to consider? How can the Shaw Center help women and men from various backgrounds in these contexts?

The Shaw Center has continuously and seriously asked about sexism, racism, and other oppressions from the beginning of our history—they have been some of our main concerns. The Shaw Center has fought for women’s equality and all people’s humanity for twenty-six years; because of this effort, we have changed some parts of the world and ourselves. From this experience, we realize that we cannot stop now. We recognize that we need to learn more about the broader understandings of these oppressions in real ministerial contexts and to challenge ourselves more. We have to critically raise our awareness of society’s systematic distortion as well as our individual irresponsibility as members of that society.

Now it is time to start again. We celebrated our past. We are honoring our present. And we know that this is not the end. It is the time to gather and move on together for “another better present” for all women and men. Let’s do it. Together.

SHAW CENTER HOSTS FORUM ON THE POWER OF SYMBOLS

After Women and the Word 2004 concluded, several students at Boston University School of Theology came forward with concerns about the worship service in Marsh Chapel. During a portion of the service, liturgical dancers enacted a transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit, whirling free of their hooded burlap robes and dancing in bright red dresses as they threw rose petals in joy. Unfortunately, the first costumes evoked painful images for some people.

This event triggered discussion around the School of Theology about the power of symbols in worship, and the meanings of symbols in various cultural contexts. In response, the Anna Howard Shaw Center hosted a forum for faculty, staff, and students to express their experiences and dialogue about the power symbols hold in worship in our multicultural society. Through the conversation, it became clear that the task of becoming culturally sensitive and aware is far more challenging than many anticipate, and is a task to which we must commit our time and energy. The hour-long forum barely allowed time for those present to scratch the surface of the problems of racism, privilege, and cultural context. We at the Shaw Center hope to continue the dialogue as we prayerfully push forward in our efforts to be a multicultural woman’s center.
REFLECTIONS ON TWENTY YEARS OF WOMEN AND THE WORD

Margaret Wiborg

I have been asked to reflect on the history of Women and the Word. It all began as a single event in March of 1985. When I was offered the position as the first full-time director of the Anna Howard Shaw Center in the summer of 1984, I talked with women students about what they most wanted for women at the School. Again and again they bemoaned the fact that they never had opportunity to interact with actual clergywomen. During the summer at a clergy gathering, I asked clergywomen what would bring them to BU. Their response was that they never had the chance to hear other women preach; if we could sponsor an event where they could hear someone other than themselves preach, they would surely come. And Women and the Word was born.

I'll never forget the excitement of those two days. We had invited Rebecca Dolch, a pastor in the northeast, to preach in chapel. Several clergywomen on the planning committee had heard her preach and she came highly recommended (I remember that she bought her first computer with her stipend). Local clergywomen were asked to preach in afternoon and morning preaching workshops as well. Participants would have the opportunity to hear at least three women preach.

During the plenary session the second afternoon, participants met in small groups in the Oxnam room at the School of Theology; the assignment was to name the gifts women bring to preaching. As I recalled in my “From the Director” article in the Spring of 2002: “Recurring themes included spiritual journey, recognition of struggle, comfort and giving comfort, sensual/sexual imaging, vulnerability, connectedness, choice-making, mothering, God's presence, and God’s salvation. Women spoke out of their personal experience. Their theology was relational, incarnational, and spoke of the Divine within and around, not just the Divine above and apart. They used stories, stones, and nurturing images, and they laughed with one another. Their styles included gestures that flowed and fit the message, visual and concrete imagery, song, dance, and storytelling. Because of fewer role models, the attendees spoke of their style coming from the place of divine love within.” The energy level of the women as they named and claimed their unique gifts to the art of preaching was like a holy eureka! People began to immediately talk about the future: “Next year, we should...” So, Women and the Word became an annual event.

The evaluation form the first few years included the question, “How many times have you heard a woman preach?” For several years the answer was 0, 1, 2, or 3. When we began to get larger numbers, that question was no longer relevant and was deleted from the form.

Women and the Word continued with varying emphasis. After the first year with one major preacher, we moved to two or several main preachers acknowledging what we all had learned: women’s preaching comes in many forms, and the women who preach well come from many different ethnic and experiential backgrounds. We included women who were theologians, women whose focus was liturgy, and artists and dancers in the mix.

When the women were asked why they came, their answers varied—they came for the opportunity to hear other women preach, for the major speakers, to gather with a group of women of similar interests, and to reconnect with friends. Mothers and daughters have come together, prospective students have come, and present students have become more and more active in the preparation for and the content of Women and the Word. When I served on the Board of Ordained Ministry a number of years ago, I remember reading the autobiographical statement of one woman who said that coming to Women and the Word encouraged her to go into ministry.

This year when I attended, I truly enjoyed seeing speakers from former years. They had not lost their special gifts that led us to invite them in the first place, and they have matured in beautiful ways. Watching the younger women interact with the more mature reminded me of why we began. Experiencing the energy and the concerns for things Anna might have preached about was gratifying. As I sat through one session between two former students—both of whom are now District Superintendents—I realized that women in ministry have come a long way. I delight that the program has continued and been a blessing to so many for twenty years, and has transformed the context from which it arose. No longer is the Women and the Word conference needed to enable women to hear other women preach for the first time. Is this particular event one that needs to continue, or does the Center need to again ask this question: What can we do to enable you, both clergy and laity, as women in ministry? It is a question we need to ask ourselves again and again—especially at the twenty-year mark. ✪
THE FUTURE OF FEMINISM

Linda Clark

"Is Feminism Alive?"

This question and the subsequent article by our new Shaw Center director, Hee An Choi, in the Fall/Winter 2003 issue of the Anna Howard Shaw Center newsletter bring to the forefront issues that must be addressed. As one who participated in the struggle for women's liberation for the last 40 years, I can attest to the enormous changes that have been made thanks to the commitment on the part of hundreds of thousands of women and men—some now household names, but most unknown. Hee An lists their accomplishments in her article, describing the struggle that gradually opened up both physical and psychic space for women in many institutions that exert enormous power over our individual and communal lives. The actual space—the Anna Howard Shaw Center—and the School of Theology's commitment to support the center by hiring a director attest to the recognition of the accomplishments of women and men in carving out this space at the School and in other places.

Hee An also points the way to the future in underscoring the need to broaden the struggle to include people of other cultures and ethnic origins. So, we pick up the mantle of struggle again in order to enlarge the space and try to come to grips with racism and ethnocentrism. Yes, feminism is alive but it has a different cast—a different look.

It also has a different feel. In the beginning of what we labeled the "Women's Movement" we had no vocabulary, no strategy, no known path ahead. What we had mainly was anger. In the face of the patronizing befuddlement of the male establishment at Union Theological Seminary, all we could do was scream! I remember being lectured by a professor at Union who pointed to the line from Genesis, "... in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them," and said that it was obvious that the word "he" referred both to male and female, so why should I have a problem with it? What he saw as an answer to a problem, I saw as the problem itself.

That anger became an unconstrained, over-the-top burst of prolonged creative energy! Out of it, we engaged in an enormous amount of organizing, protesting, gathering, and thinking. It also brought us together; we started a consciousness-raising group. For a semester, we went through a list of questions provided to us by a group called the Radical Feminists. Each Sunday night one of the questions would be the topic of discussion. A favorite was: "Are you a nice girl? Is your smile like a nervous tic?"

In the preceding paragraph I originally wrote: "Once we channeled that anger into constructive action, we engaged in an enormous amount of organizing, etc." However, it wasn't like that. Through organizing, thinking, meeting, gathering, marching, and screaming, we learned to channel anger into constructive action. It was a sloppy, frightening, exhilarating, spontaneous coming-to-terms with oppression. In the process, we also discovered the untold numbers of feminists who came before us, and we began to unearth the lives and work of women consigned—through trivialization and not-so-benevolent neglect—to the historical dustbin.

A reaction to all this action-fueling anger led to feminism becoming unpleasant news in many quarters. As a result, much of the anger subsided or went underground; unfortunately, so did a major source of the energy that fueled the work. This shift makes moving toward the goals that Hee An describes difficult. In the sixties, there were protest movements galore—the civil rights, anti-war, and Gray Power movements, for example. Revolt was in the air and anger created an instant collective. Arguments that came up in more reasonable times were put aside for the moment. I experience this shift as a great loss, but I see that it was inevitable.

We live in very different times, times with a different feel. The instant collective of the sixties turned out to harbor racism. Arguments that were lost in the din now emerge as essential to moving forward. The imperative for justice remains. Our immediate history can only give us the direction and a vague outline of the way to open up both physical and psychic space to all voices in our School and in the religious, political, and economic institutions of our world. In the face of ambiguity, uneasiness, and the unknown path, the question is: Do we have the will to take this journey on?
NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE STH WOMEN

Dr. Nancy Ammerman celebrates her first year as a member of the STH faculty. Somehow between all those classes and meetings, Nancy found the time to complete her book, which University of California Press will publish later this year. The book, entitled Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners, provides an overview of the way congregations of all kinds do their work and sustain their members and traditions while contributing to the well-being of their communities and the world.

Marsha Cutting has been selected to attend the Wabash Institute’s Workshop for Pre-Tenured Faculty at Theological School this summer, and will apply for a research grant for the following summer. Marsha will also present a paper, “Exploring Positive and Negative Experiences of Supervision in Clinical Pastoral Education,” at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Associates in Hawaii this August.

Dr. Katheryn Pfisterer Darr has been promoted from associate to full professor of Hebrew Bible. She is currently working on a book about proverbs in the prophetic literature of ancient Israel. The Shaw Center congratulates Katty on her exciting achievements!


Linda Teller proposes a film for your summer leisure time: Mosty Martha (Bella Martha) follows a strong German chef named Martha as monumental events in her personal life begin to overshadow her professional life. Often humorous, this enjoyable film is a must for those who love movies with strong female heroes (German with English subtitles).

This fall, Boston University School of Theology will welcome two new women to the faculty. Dr. Karen Westerfield Tucker will teach worship, and Ms. Shelly Rambo will join the theology department. We look forward to seeing their new faces among the women faculty!

WOMEN AND THE WORD AUDIO TAPEs

Discover or rediscover the 2004 Women and the Word Conference, “Celebrating the Past, Honoring the Present, Envisioning the Future.” One $20 set of tapes includes all of the plenary sessions from this year’s event. Order yours today!

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