

# The Center for Practical Theology 2020 Newsletter

BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



## A TRIBUTE TO THE LEGACY OF DEAN MARY ELIZABETH MOORE

**BRYAN STONE, CO-DIRECTOR,  
CENTER FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY**

On Wednesday, April 22, the School of Theology (STH) held an all-day celebration of Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore's career and her leadership as Dean of Boston University School of Theology for eleven and a half years. The celebration included a special Earth Day worship service to start things off, appropriate especially for Dean Moore's scholarship at the intersections of theology and ecological justice. But it

was also a fitting worship service given her tremendous activism within the University in guiding the ecological sustainability of the School and shaping the witness of our building and its usage.

The School then hosted a tribute-filled "community lunch," a virtual adaptation of the weekly event that is the centerpiece of community life at STH. We heard moving accounts from students representing the STH Student Association (Sangwook Shim and Breanne MacFarland), who offered appreciation for her leadership, and we heard from Rev. Tom Porter and Dr. Judith Oleson, who recounted her importance in the creation and development of our robust Religion and Conflict Transformation program. Dr. Thomas Stegman, S.J., spoke on behalf of the Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium (the BTI), acknowledging Dean Moore's leadership of the board and

### IN THIS ISSUE

A Tribute to the Legacy of  
Dean Mary Elizabeth  
Moore - *Bryan Stone*

The Courage and Faith of  
a Scholar Midwife: A  
Tribute to Mary Elizabeth  
Moore - *Courtney Goto*

Students reflect on Dean  
Moore's legacy as a  
Practical Theologian- *Dan  
Hauge and Jennifer Lewis*

CPT Project Updates

*Creative Callings*

*The Homiletic Theology  
Project*

Announcing 2020 CPT  
Annual Lecture

About Us

thanking her for the healthy and hearty participation of STH in that consortium over the years. Finally, Dr. Courtney Goto offered a tribute to Dean Moore for her legacy in the discipline of practical theology, and that tribute is included in this, our inaugural issues of the Center for Practical Theology newsletter.

To cap off the day's activities, a scholarly panel was convened from among STH faculty reflecting on the legacy of Dean Moore in the areas of feminist and women's voice in theology (Dr. Shelly Rambo), ecological justice and sustainability (Dr. Rebecca Copeland), and dismantling white privilege (Dean Teddy Hickman-Maynard and Bishop Susan Hassinger). We were joined by President Brown at the beginning of the panel for the announcement of a new student fellowship in Dean Moore's honor and the official re-naming of the Mary Elizabeth and Allen Moore Community Center. The Dean Mary Elizabeth Moore Fellowship Fund will aid future generations of STH students, and it celebrates Dean Moore's lifelong passion for journeying with others to cultivate deeper faith, compassionate humanity, and a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world. The Moore Fellowship will be awarded annually to up to three master's students who are committed to the empowerment of women in the theological academy, religious institutions, or wider society.



The Center for Practical Theology also wishes to acknowledge the leadership of Dean Moore in helping to advance its work and to position it more strongly with a financial base and creative, interdisciplinary programs and projects. It is therefore fitting that we honor Dean Moore with this inaugural edition of what we hope will be an annual Center for Practical Theology newsletter.

## THE COURAGE AND FAITH OF A SCHOLAR MIDWIFE: A TRIBUTE TO MARY ELIZABETH MOORE

*COURTNEY T. GOTO, CO-DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY*



I met Dean Moore when I was a student at Emory University seventeen years ago. Although she was not my primary advisor, she was a trusted mentor from the beginning. For the past ten years, she has been my Dean, my colleague, and my friend. In being invited to pay tribute to Dean Moore, I quickly realized that I would need help. There's a way in which being close to someone makes it more challenging to gain a wider perspective on what the person has contributed. I'm grateful for conversations with Katherine Turpin, Joyce Mercer, Bud Horell, and Chris Schlauch that facilitated my thinking, and for support from my advisees.

## THE COURAGE AND FAITH OF A SCHOLAR MIDWIFE CONT.

In what follows, I lend a way of understanding Dean Moore's contributions to the fields of religious education and practical theology by way of metaphor, using select work from her corpus. I take inspiration from Rosalind Janssen's feminist reading of the story of Shiphrah and Puah, two ancient midwives from Exodus whose gifts of strength, cleverness, and discernment enabled them to serve their people well.[1] I'll do this in three steps, first focusing on the midwives as what I call "outside-insiders." Second and third, I borrow Janssen's terms as she describes these midwives as "prophetesses" and "tricksters." Midwives bring others into life. They are servants and facilitators of others' lives, which are rich ways of thinking about Dean Moore's life work.[2] When she heard me give this tribute for her retirement celebration, she revealed that the story of Shiphrah and Puah is one of her favorites.

Although Shiphrah and Puah are often assumed to have assisted Hebrew women, Janssen believes it's preposterous to imagine that two midwives could have birthed the babies of 60,000 Israelite couples.[3] Instead, Janssen concludes that Shiphrah and Puah were Hebrew women overseeing other midwives helping to birth newborns fathered by Pharaoh, which means they were in the unusual position of being minority leaders in an Egyptian space, that is Pharaoh's harem. [4] In my estimation, Shiphrah and Puah were what I would call "outside-insiders." They were outsiders by virtue of being members of an oppressed group, but they earned their way into significant positions. However, even as they served insiders, they never lost the perspective and wisdom that comes from having been oppressed. In Dean Moore's case by analogy, I believe she became an outside-insider over the span of her career, which also enabled her to make valuable contributions as a scholar.

Dean Moore's early work came at a difficult time for women in religious education and practical theology. In religious education, there were few senior women scholars, and virtually none of them had permanently appointed



positions. In practical theology, there were even fewer senior women, except for Riet Bons-Storm and Denise Ackermann.[5] Bons-Storm and Dean Moore were the only women in the Dutch-North American Dialogues in Practical Theology, which preceded and provided momentum for what would become the International Academy of Practical Theology.[6] At the time that Dean Moore was launching her career, "women in schools faced an uphill battle for jobs and promotion," writes Clare Bischoff.[7] "Women needed to be published even more so than their male colleagues to promote their marketability and job stability." [8] The fact that Dean Moore trained in both in systematic theology and in practical theology speaks not only of her dedication to the craft of research, but perhaps more subtly the lengths she needed to go to be recognized by male colleagues. I liken Dean Moore's experience to being like Shiphrah and Puah—Hebrew women who were called to tend to mothers and newborns while functioning in a highly competitive Egyptian space. According to Janssen, the setting in which the midwives lived required them to have their wits about them and even to engage in "scheming" to manage Pharaoh in order to survive.[9]

[1] Rosalind Janssen, "A New Reading of Shiphrah and Puah—Recovering their Voices," *Feminist Theology* 27, no. 1 (2018): 9-25.

[2] For a thoughtful review of the Dean's life and work, particularly in relation to religious education, see Claire Bischoff, "Mary Elizabeth Moore," Database: Christian Educators of the 20th Century. Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. <https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/mary-elizabeth-moore>

[3] Janssen, "A New Reading of Shiphrah and Puah," 11.

[4] Janssen, "A New Reading of Shiphrah and Puah," 15, 16.

[5] Mary Elizabeth Moore, email to author, April 21, 2020.

[6] Mary Elizabeth Moore, email to author, April 21, 2020.

[7] Bischoff, "Mary Elizabeth Moore."

[8] Bischoff, "Mary Elizabeth Moore."

[9] Janssen, "A New Reading of Shiphrah and Puah," 14.



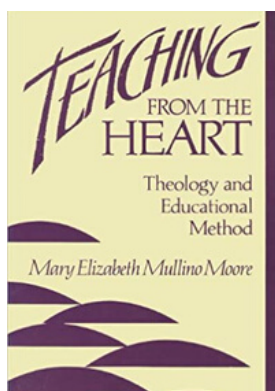
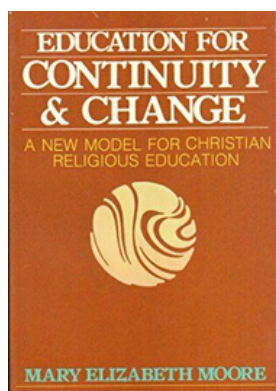
## CONT.

It was in this context that Dean Moore's first book, *Education for Continuity and Change*, was published in 1983. [10] For some perspective, I turn to Bud Horell, who has done extensive work on the religious education movement. He says,

I read [Moore's first] book as carrying forward the focus on education for social reconstruction and transformation that has been present in the field since its founding and that in the early years was represented best by George Albert Coe's *A Social Theology of Education*. However, *Education for Continuity and Change* also takes into account the effort that began in the mid twentieth century to ground religious education in the traditions and practices of religious communities.[11]

It's from this theological and practical foundation that Dean Moore provides a vision for change. In her next book, entitled *Teaching from the Heart* (1991),[12] she leverages her training in both process theology and religious education to publish a volume that probably none of her contemporaries could write. Again Horell writes,

*Teaching from The Heart*...addresses the concern for the theological foundations of religious education. [Moore] advocates, of course, for a process theology approach within religious education, and she has helped religious educators to see the limitations of the efforts that began in the 1930s to use neo-Orthodox theology to guide the field...in order to move it beyond the original grounding of religious education in liberal theology.[13]



Even as Dean Moore became an expert in religious education and practical theology, we can imagine that she did so step by courageous step. While in her early work, she would have needed to produce scholarship valued by powerful insiders in religious education and practical theology, later she could be more free or bold to express her expertise as an outside-insider, perhaps having a more secure place on which to stand and to speak.

Returning again to the image of midwife, imagine the difficult political and cultural terrain that Shiphrah and Puah had to regularly traverse, needing to vie for status, while doing work that was vulnerable, personal, and literally messy. Their situation helps me to imagine what was like for Dean Moore when she became the first female president of the International Academy of Practical Theology, the Association of Practical Theology and the Religious Education Association. Being the first woman leader of each of these major professional organizations could not have been a walk in the park, considering their long and unbroken habits of male leadership. Many years later, she co-edited and wrote a key chapter for a festschrift for Johannes Van der Ven, a leading Dutch practical theologian and a founding member of the International Academy of Practical Theology.[14] I mark these points to invite you to notice the distance a courageous scholar midwife traveled, not shying away from the frequently challenging tasks of birthing scholarly disciplines.

Janssen describes Shiphrah and Puah women as “prophetesses.” In near eastern culture, midwives were associated with those who could discern whether a patient would live or die.[15] The role of the prophetess was to “speak up or out” as Janssen says.[16] If we examine Dean Moore’s publications, we see a consistent commitment to speaking up about the concerns of women, youth, the environment, people of color, and the importance of interfaith relationships—all of whom or which have been marginalized by the majority in the academy, the church, and society. For example, her book *Ministering with the Earth* (1998)[17] is a prophetic contribution to religious education and practical theology that was ahead of where most of these fields were on issues of sustainability. Over

[10] Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Education for Continuity and Change: A New Model for Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983).

[11] Harold Horell, email to author, March 8, 2020.

[12] Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching from the Heart: Theology and Educational Method*. (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998).

[13] Harold Horell, email to author, March 8, 2020.

[14] Mary Elizabeth Moore and Chris A.M Hermans, eds., *Hermeneutics and Empirical Research in Practical Theology: The Contribution of Empirical Theology by Johannes A. Van der Ven* (Leuven: Brill, 2005).

[15] Janssen, “A New Reading of Shiphrah and Puah,” 18.

[16] Janssen, “A New Reading of Shiphrah and Puah,” 19.

[17] Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Ministering with the Earth* (St. Louis: Chalice, 1998).

## CONT.

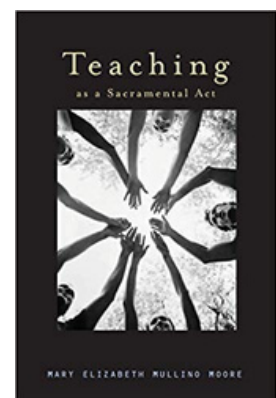
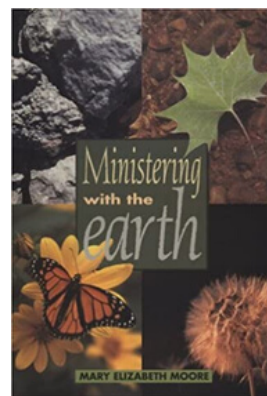


her research career, Dean Moore has fostered conversations about nascent ideas that are beginning to crown in people's consciousness, which is what a midwife does. Although these conversations are more common now, we owe a debt to Dean Moore for helping to birth a sense of moral urgency and theological reflection about these issues so that current and future scholars could benefit from this hard labor.

Janssen's reading of Shiphrah and Puah provides a third image—that these midwives were “tricksters.” The author rejects interpretations of these midwives as “lowly,” “simple,” or “uneducated” women.[18] Instead she meticulously builds a case for their agency, arguing that they subvert Pharaoh's declaration to kill all male babies born to Hebrews. Through a single retort, the clever midwives implicitly jab at Pharaoh himself.[19] It's this image of midwife as trickster that caught me as a fresh way to name some of Dean Moore's scholarly contributions. In her 2014 book, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, she writes about “expecting the unexpected” and the “power of reversals.” [20] She sees these as basic not only to the way God works in the world but also to teaching at its best. These chapters give us clue to Dean Moore's scholarly leadership as a trickster. In order to transform centers of power and entrenched social patterns in the academy one must leverage limited resources to catalyze and support shifts in thinking and being. That takes shrewdness, resourcefulness, and creativity as a scholar and member of a guild. One colleague named Dean Moore's gift to the field as her ability to sneak in feminist perspectives, to advocate for women doctoral students, and to legitimate research in

ecology and spirituality without raising alarm. Beneath the friendly, gentle, charming exterior is a pit bull, says this same colleague.

In conclusion, I invite you to return once again to the image of a midwife. A midwife scholar does not make clones of herself, but instead she helps to birth that which is new—be they aspiring students, new ideas, and new ways of being—to go on and have an impact in the world. However, in the process of birth, we (particularly those who have been mentored by Dean Moore) take on and carry forward the strength, love, and support we experienced at our beginning. Yes, we learned theories, methods, and subject matter from her, but we also learned from her example. At some point, WE students, went on to become midwives to others. Over her career, Dean Moore has served as mid-wife to many PhD students, which has been another important way she has built up the fields of religious education and practical theology. Some of her earliest PhD students, whose dissertations she advised, have gone on to shape the field as senior scholars. These include Dean Blevins, Randy Litchfield, Alan Smith, Yolanda Smith and many others. Imagine the faces of all students for whom Dean Moore has served as mid-wife from her years at Claremont, at Emory, and now STH. Now imagine all the junior colleagues in religious education and practical theology whose scholarship and advancement she supported. All of these folks are standing with Dean Moore, returning her gaze. I am proud and grateful to say that Dean Moore has helped me become myself as a scholar, a teacher, and as a person. Behind those of us who have been mentored by her, imagine the students and colleagues for whom each of us has been a mid-wife. Imagine that these too look with gratitude. Mary Elizabeth Moore has birthed a generation of midwives, and for that we are thankful. [May 2020.](#)



[18] Janssen, “A New Reading of Shiphrah and Puah,” 16.

[19] Janssen, “A New Reading of Shiphrah and Puah,” 21.

[20] Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2004).

# STUDENTS REFLECT ON DEAN MOORE'S LEGACY AS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGIAN

"The first word that comes to mind when I think of Dean Moore as a practical theologian is *generosity*. She exhibits genuine enthusiasm for students producing work that explores our distinct passions and employs methodological creativity. In seminar, she introduced me to theologies that expanded my vision of what practical theology could be, which in turn inspired me to pursue my own integration of disciplines. Most importantly, I believe, Dean Moore conducts herself with a **steadfast humility and humanity sorely needed in academic theology**, never losing sight of the sacredness of life which is the true end of theological reflection."



- Dan Hauge, PhD Student,  
Practical Theology

"Like many others, I first met Mary Elizabeth through her words. I was leaving our seminary's religious education building when I decided to make a brief stop at our lending library of education books. As I skimmed the titles, one caught my eye: *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* by Mary Elizabeth Moore. I remember bringing it home and reading it in the afternoon sun. Each chapter spoke of the transforming possibilities of teaching, the educator's role in mediating God's grace, and the joy and risk of creating sacramental communities, and I savored every page. The timing of my find had been somewhat providential. I had loved teaching for a long time and always thought of it as sacred, a practice of love that brought people into deeper communion with God, themselves, and others. Yet Dean Moore's words gave me a language by which to name the dynamis, the God-inspired power of education at time when

I was still discerning my vocation. Thanks to her leading, I began to take up religious education as a research interest while also reaching toward my own vision of teaching as a eucharistic practice, a vision that continues to energize my work now.

When I learned, nearly three years after first encountering Dean Moore's work, that I had been offered a position in Boston University's School of Theology's PhD program, I felt profoundly grateful – and unbelievably excited. We all stand on the shoulders of others, and Mary Elizabeth had been one of the people whose influence on my life was deep. Yet I had only ever engaged with her from afar and even then, only through the pages of her books. Now I had a chance to be part of the sacramental community she had helped to cultivate at STH, to pursue my own call to teaching under her leadership. I felt as if I had been given a glorious and sacred gift.

Imagine my joy, then, when the opportunity came to finally meet Dean Moore during those early days of orientation. I never could have expected that she would be even more compassionate and inspiring in person than her work already suggests. But, as I and everyone else who interacts with her knows, she is! Indeed, there are few people I can think of as committed to justice, passionate about community, capable of inspiring and prophetic leading, and as full of empathy and compassion as Mary Elizabeth. She is a gem of person, a riveting and visionary scholar, a captivating and profoundly gifted leader, and **all that she does shimmers with the grace and mystery of the Divine**. As she enters this next chapter of her life and ministry, I am thankful to have spent time under her tutelage, and I am certain that her legacy will continue to live on in the lives of every person she has touched. Indeed, it is impossible, when one has engaged the kind of sacred teaching and scholarship for which Mary Elizabeth is known, to not inspire ripples that outlast the centuries, ripples that will almost certainly contribute to **the ever-living streams of justice** she has left in her wake.



- Jennifer Lewis, PhD Student,  
Practical Theology





## THE CREATIVE CALLINGS PROJECT

*JAMIE SHORE, CPT ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR*

The Creative Callings project is one of the dynamic grant projects housed in the Center for Practical Theology. Funded through the Lilly Endowment's Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose initiative, Creative Callings' innovation hub supports twelve area congregations in launching, testing, and refining innovative ministries designed to support lives of meaning and purpose.

Congregational projects vary from implementing music programs to exploring racial justice and reparations work to issuing micro-grants to help congregants overcome barriers in following their callings.

All congregational teams gather twice annually at the BU School of Theology to discuss projects, success, and challenges in a mutually supportive setting. Photos from the Hub Gathering in February are pictured above.

As the Creative Callings projects enters its second year, our congregations are adapting their projects to the new realities of the Covid-19 pandemic. In the uncertainty of this time, it is heartening to connect with these engaged leaders and journey alongside them in living out theologies of vocation.



CPT co-director Dr. Claire Wolfeich directs the Creative Callings project alongside fellow CPT-co-directors Dr. Courtney Goto and Dr. Teddy Hickman-Maynard, and colleagues Dr. Jonathan Calvillo and Dr. Wanda Stahl.

Our congregations include Bethel AME Lynn, First Baptist Church in Needham, First Baptist Church of Jamaica Plain, First Church in Cambridge, Congregational, First Congregational Church of Randolph United Church of Christ, Fourth Presbyterian Church of South Boston, Harvard-Epworth United Methodist Church, Hope Central Church, St. Mary's Episcopal Church, The Charles River Episcopal Co-Housing Endeavor (CRECHE), Union United Methodist Church, and Zion Korean United Methodist Church.

Find more information about the Creative Callings Project <https://www.creativecallingsproject.org/>.

# THE HOMILETIC THEOLOGY PROJECT

*DAVID SCHNASE JACOBSEN, CO-DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY*

The Homiletical Theology Project (HTP) started in 2012 as a way of bringing preaching and theology into a deeper dialogue. Although the Barthian tradition had long thought of theology as something you do to prepare to preach, HTP aimed to see how preaching itself is a theological activity.

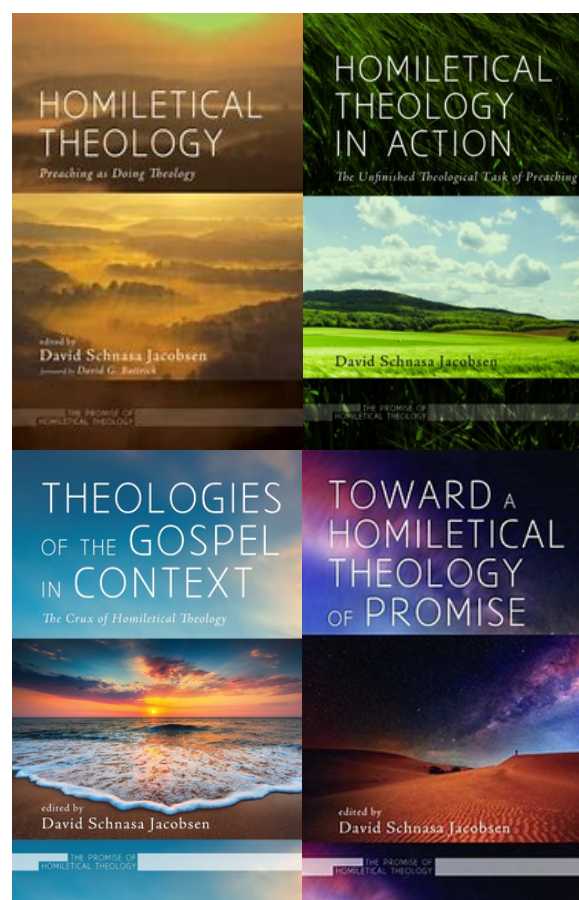
Initially this took shape of surveying the many different ways that theology and preaching relate already. These included theologies of preaching, theologies of the gospel, theologies of Word and Sacrament, the use of theology in preaching (e.g., doctrinal preaching), and even preaching as a form of theological method. Bibliographies for each of these ways of pursuing what I call generally homiletical theology are available at the project's web site: [www.bu.edu/homiletical-theology-project/theological-intersections](http://www.bu.edu/homiletical-theology-project/theological-intersections)

As the project developed, however, its focus shifted in particular to how a theology of the gospel operates at the center of the preacher's work in practice. An operative theology of the gospel both impacts and responds to the contexts, cultures, language, and situations in which preaching takes place. This notion came especially to the fore in the third volume of the consultation's work, *Theologies of the Gospel in Context: The Crux of Homiletical Theology*. Here much of the conversation dealt with the relationship of one's "working gospel" (André Resner) to a critically-reflective gospel that arose by means of dialoging with texts and situations in the preaching task itself.

In recent years this dialogical relationship has prompted a deeper consideration of matters of pedagogy and practice. The pedagogical banner has been carried forward in particular by the work of the Wabash Consultation on Homiletical Pedagogy and Intercultural Communication. In this consultation, urgent questions of identity and intercultural instructional communication came to the fore as keys to the process of the kind of integrative theological work that happens in the preaching classroom. Tending to and naming identity in the process of teaching and learning preaching across difference became an ever more important

part of the move between one's "working gospel" to a more critically reflective naming of gospel in dialogue with texts and situations.

The telos of HTP is an approach to preaching that sees itself as a thoroughgoing theological task. In the near term this includes a reworking of classic theological problems that have troubled the pulpit: the relationship of Christian preaching to the Hebrew Bible, problems related to language, justice, and sacramental grace; and even the rhetorical and conversational means by which Christian preaching itself instantiates a nascent constructive theology in primary speech.







# *The Center For Practical Theology's 13th Annual Lecture*

## **Dr. Heather Walton**

*Senior Lecturer in Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Glasgow and Co-director of the Centre for Literature, Theology and the Arts at the University of Glasgow.*

**November 19th, 2020**

*Mary Elizabeth and Allen Moore Community Center | Reception at 5:30 with lecture following | Drinks and Hearty hors d'oeuvres served*



*Photos from the 2019 Annual Lecture*

# ABOUT US

## Mission

The Center for Practical Theology seeks to provide a bridge between the scholarly resources, questions, and insights of a university-based theological seminary and the wisdom, questions, and traditions of communities of faith.

In doing so, the Center provides an infrastructure for sustaining, deepening, and expanding important relationships and connections between Boston University School of Theology and local congregations, denominational offices, and religious centers so that they may be more integrally incorporated into student learning and faculty teaching and research. The Center was created in January 2005.

## What is Practical Theology?

“Practical theology” describes the mutually strengthening relationship between the theological learning and research of a university-based seminary, and the actual experience and needs of Christian communities. It embraces a dynamic vision of the web of ecclesiastical, academic, and social institutions that together sustain excellent pastoral leaders and healthy, vibrant Christian communities.

A commitment to practical theology is a guiding principal of curricular and program development, generating a wealth of collaborations and connections between the School and congregations and pastoral leaders across the country. The Center for Practical Theology exists to consolidate, coordinate, sustain and build upon these collaborations and connections.

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