

THE CENTER FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY 2020 NEWSLETTER

BOSTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY



A YEAR IN REVIEW

BY AMY MCLAUGHLIN-SHEASBY

The 2020-2021 academic year was certainly another year for the books. As the School of Theology continued to follow precautions regarding the pandemic, students and faculty continued to adapt. Long anticipated conferences became virtual events; classes met on Zoom and the hallways of the school remained relatively empty. And yet, the Center for Practical Theology remained active, demonstrating the field's dedication to responding to crises with theological reflection and action. In this year's newsletter, we have chosen to highlight the ongoing work of a few projects within the CPT, as well as the activity and accomplishments of our doctoral and recent graduates.

In December 2020, the CPT hosted its thirteenth Annual CPT Lecture. We were fortunate to have Dr. Heather Walton,

join us virtually to deliver her lecture, "Body and Stone: Practical Theology as Creative Work." BUSTH lecturer in Practical Theology, and STH graduate, Dr. Callid Keefe-Perry responded to Walton's lecture. A recording of the event can be found on the CPT website. Additionally, Vaughn Nelson, a current PhD student in Practical Theology, offered his own response to the lecture in CPT Today.

Below, you will read about the ongoing work of some grant-funded projects within the CPT, included updates from Creative Callings, and the Homiletical Theology Project. Additionally, you will read about a new project that has received a four-year grant from the Lily Endowment titled, "Trauma-Responsive Congregations: Equipping Thriving Urban Congregations to Respond to Collective Trauma." The project is led by Director, Dr. Shelly Rambo, along with Associate Project Directors, Dr. Bryan Stone and Dr. Theodore Hickman-Maynard. Project Coordinator, Dayna Olsen-Getty has written a summary of the project along

with its goals for the future for this newsletter.

Finally, the CPT welcomes our new CPT Administrative Coordinator, Madison Boboltz! Madison joined the team at the beginning of 2021 upon Jamie Shore's departure from the position. As Jamie takes on a new position within the School of Theology, we remain grateful for the many ways she served the CPT during her time with us.

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CREATIVE CALLINGS

BY CATE NELSON

Creative Callings, a grant-funded project within the Center for Practical Theology, supports eleven New England “Hub” congregations that are engaged in innovative work around personal and communal discernment, vocation, and calling. Our congregations are nearing the end of their second of three years of project work, and have spent the last year creatively adapting their projects to pandemic realities. Attention to justice is a high priority for our hub congregations. For many of our congregations, nurturing a prophetic vocation—within current political and denominational situations as well as local neighborhoods—is urgent, exhausting, and compelling. It requires enormous creativity and courage.

This year involved two online gatherings with the full Hub, where the Creative Callings team and the congregations’ leadership teams gathered so support and resource each other in the work. Teams presented challenges, questions, and pivots in their work, and our faculty team led workshops on practices of communal discernment. All the while, our Creative Callings team is folding the Hub work and activities back into our research, while also participating in research opportunities with other Hubs through the Lilly Foundation. Meanwhile, our congregations have been moving in rhythm with their projects, work, and discernment. Here is a glimpse of a few of the creative and innovative activities our congregations designed and offered this year:

- One congregation continued with meaningful pastoral teaching, small group discernment, and public activism in their project “Find Your Purpose, Fund Your Breakthrough,” which equips individuals in discerning and walking in their calling. The members of the church received mini “Breakthrough Grants” to support activities related to personal vocation and calling.

- A predominately white church continued their work at the intersection of racial justice and spiritual formation, as they engage in research, remembrance, repentance, and reparations for their church’s slaveholding history. They engaged James Cone’s work on The Cross and the Lynching Tree for their Lenten preaching series and developed a learning series on “A Call to Return,” emphasizing spiritual reflection in the work of racial justice.
- A congregation that had made headway into creating a music school in their church building pivoted to create a virtual music camp for local youth. This congregation went on to host a virtual Christmas concert later in the year.
- A congregation with a significant student-aged population launched a digital online journaling program to help people reflect on their lives and discern their vocation.
- Another congregation launched a new community house in the middle of the pandemic, through partnership with one of our other Hub organizations, which works on community co-housing.

"Even amidst all that loss, there was an opportunity to rest and reflect."



Creative Callings Cont.

Amidst the creativity and activity, many congregations articulated a silver lining of this the pandemic year: that even in the midst of all that loss, there was an opportunity to rest and reflect. There was more space to ask big questions as a community and to act with intention, which opened room for meaningful discernment.

We look forward to continuing to support and learn with and from our congregations as they move into their final year of project work.

Creative Callings is a grant-funded project within the Center for Practical Theology. Funded by the Lilly Endowment's Called to Lives of Meaning and Purpose Institute, Creative Callings innovation hub supports eleven congregations in launching, testing, and refining innovative ministries designed to support lives of meaning and purpose. Creative Callings is directed by Dr. Claire Wolfeich alongside, Dr. Jonathan Calvillo, Dr. Teddy Hickman-Maynard, Dr. Courtney Goto, and Dr. Wanda Stahl. Find more information about the Creative Callings at www.creativecallingsproject.org.

THE HOMILETICAL THEOLOGY PROJECT

BY DAVID SCHNASE JACOBSEN

"The Homiletical Theology Project" is now picking up again. Two projects will be moving toward conclusion this year.

First, the HTP Wabash grant project on intercultural communication theory and homiletical pedagogy will conclude on May 31 with articles from the consultation participants' research projects. Drs. Jared Alcántara, Gerald Liu, André Resner, Sarah Travis along with the grant co-directors David Schnase Jacobsen and doctoral candidate Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby will conclude their research projects with the submission of a paper by the end of the grant period. In recent news, grant participants learned that the juried journal *Homiletic* will be devoting a special issue to the consultation's papers. The papers will be submitted for review in September with a view toward preparing them for publication in the Winter 2021 issue. The consultation will be naming one of their own to be the editor for the special issue.

Second, the HTP consultation project on Christian Preaching and the Old Testament will present its work at the 2021 Academy of Homiletics meeting in December in Chicago IL. Consultation participants Alexander Deeg (Leipzig), David Schnase Jacobsen (BUSTH), Yolanda Norton (SFTS), Carolyn Sharp (Yale Divinity School), Amy McLaughlin-Sheasby (Abilene Christian), and David Stark (Sewanee) will be sharing their work in anticipation of a future joint publication project.

TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE CONGREGATIONS: EQUIPPING URBAN CONGREGATIONS TO RESPOND TO COLLECTIVE TRAUMA

BY DAYNA OSLEN-GETTY

Boston University School of Theology (BUSTH) is pleased to announce that Lilly Endowment Inc. has awarded BUSTH a nearly \$1 million, four-year grant to work with urban congregations responding to trauma. This project identifies the need for urban congregations to respond to trauma from theologically-informed and spiritually-integrative perspectives, as their congregants are continually shaped by and are reacting to the compounding of domestic and global traumatic events.

At the heart of this project is an awareness of the heavy load that many congregational leaders and members are experiencing. Many congregations operate as first-responders and safety-nets in the face of various forms of trauma. Incidents of gun violence, ongoing conditions of homelessness, changing policies on immigration, and the rise of violence against Black, brown, and Asian communities in the U.S., all impact the life of faith.

Our conviction is that congregations have organic resources for trauma response and are often already equipped for and engaged in trauma-responsive ministry. We will seek to foster mutual learning among a network of educators and congregational leaders by drawing on the lived wisdom of congregations in responding to trauma, while also providing support and educational resources to deepen those responses within congregations.

As participants in this project, fifteen congregations in three major cities – Boston, San Diego, and Atlanta - will undertake a process of examining their congregational life through a framework of trauma that integrates clinically-oriented research about trauma with theologically-grounded analysis of what it means to live faithfully in the midst of trauma.

Participating congregations will have opportunities to learn from educators from a variety of disciplines with expertise and experience in trauma response and to build relationships with other ministries responding to trauma in their city, as well as grant funding to develop trauma-responsive pilot projects in their own contexts.

"This program is organized around assisting [urban congregations] in developing models of trauma-responsive care that are deeply integrated into the mission of the congregations and that draw from the organic resources of congregational life," says BUSTH Associate Professor of Theology and principal investigator on the project Shelly Rambo.

"When congregations consider what it means to be trauma-informed, they often look outside for resources. As educational partners, we hope to provide some "theological on-ramps" for congregations to explore, from within, what it means to be a trauma-responsive church," says Rambo. "We are excited that the Lilly Endowment has made it possible for BU School of Theology to collaborate with congregations in this work."

To learn more, we encourage you to visit our project website at <https://www.traumaresponsivecongregations.org/>.

CPT Today

CPT Today is the blog of The Center for Practical Theology. Here you'll find posts under the categories of Book Reviews, News and Events, Opportunities, Perspectives, Practical Theology Profiles, and Research Reflections. Interested in submitting? Please see our [submission guidelines](#) and feel free to be in touch with Madison Boboltz at cpt@bu.edu with any questions!

HONORING OUR PHD GRADUATES

The Center for Practical Theology is pleased to announce and celebrate six recent PhD graduates from the School of Theology, whose projects represent the cutting edge of our field. Their names, along with the titles of their dissertations, are listed below.

Dr. Tim Adkins-Jones

REVELATION THROUGH CONVERSATION: CALL AND RESPONSE AS
A PRACTICE OF CONGREGATIONAL EMPOWERMENT

Dr. Kate Common

FEMINIST ECCLESIOLOGY AND A LIBERATING COUNTERHISTORY:
REIMAGINING CHURCH FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Dr. Callid Keefe-Perry

SCHOOLING THE IMAGINATION: A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF
PUBLIC EDUCATION

Dr. James Tomlinson

HUMILITY: BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY AND PSYCHOLOGY IN
DIALOGUE

Dr. Dan Hauge

THE CULPABILITY OF COMFORT: A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF
WHITE RESISTANCE TO
CRITICAL ANTI-RACIST PEDAGOGY

Dr. Soren Hessler

ADJUDICATING ORTHOPRAXY: A HISTORY OF ACCREDITATION
PRACTICES IN THEOLOGICAL
EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 1918 – 1968



CPT Partnership with Studying Congregations

The Studying Congregations [website](#) is a valuable resource dedicated to providing research about how and why people of faith around the world gather. The website is committed to its partnership with the Center for Practical Theology as both organizations consider the intersection of calling and congregational life.

The website's content consists of articles and videos written and produced by the Congregational Studies Team, an informal research group founded in 1982. Their work is funded by The Lilly Endowment, and the website project director is Nancy T. Ammerman, leading scholar in Sociology of Religion and former professor at Boston University School of Theology. The website divides its content into three main sections: Understand, Explore, and Engage.

The Understand section implements frames of study including ecology, theology, culture, resources, and process. In the Explore section, visitors to the website can read what insights experts from various fields—anthropology, social work, theology, sociology, public policy, ritual studies—are contributing to this work. In the Engage section, those interested in engaging their own research project can download a free toolkit made up of PDFs put together by the Studying Congregations research team. These are wonderful tools to share with students, theological educators, and religious leaders.

You can receive updates on recently published materials by liking Studying Congregations on [Facebook](#).

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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