

**2015** CHRISTIAN  
LEADERSHIP  
FORUM

# ACTIVE FAITH MATTERS

*Inspiring Leaders to  
Shape the Future*



# TO LIVE AN ACTIVE FAITH, WE...

PLANT NEW CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

OPEN SHELTERS FOR THE HOMELESS

BRING FRESH PRODUCE TO FOOD PANTRIES

BUILD MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN  
PEOPLE OF ALL RACES

DELIVER MEALS TO HOME-BOUND ELDERS

WELCOME AND ASSIST REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS  
FIGHT GLOBAL WARMING

STAND AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING

OPEN OUR FAITH COMMUNITIES TO EVERYONE

DESIGN NEW MINISTRIES TO END POVERTY

TEACH FUTURE PASTORS AND PROFESSORS

ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC POLICY THAT  
SUPPORTS HUMAN SERVICES

SHARE GOD'S LOVE THROUGH PRISON MINISTRY

PROVIDE LEGAL RESOURCES TO  
EMPOWER COMMUNITIES

CREATE SACRED SPACES  
FOR WORSHIP AND HOSPITALITY

USE ART TO TRANSFORM AND HEAL

HELP OTHERS DISCOVER THEIR PURPOSE AND CALL

STRIVE TO BUILD THE BELOVED COMMUNITY

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**Shakei Haynes** @ShakeiHaynes

#FTEforum15 has awakened something in my soul and I am leaving Dallas inspired and rejuvenated! Ready to start the work back in D.C.

**Quantisha Mason** @blackseminarian

The thing about rivers is that they can cut down mountains #FTEforum15

**Linda I. Jiménez** @QuirkyChurchGrl

For every vision there is a visionary. - @revdionneb #FTEforum15



## Does an Active Faith Matter?

**T**his is the question we explored at the 2015 FTE Christian Leadership Forum.



Over three days in Dallas, FTE hosted a diverse, intergenerational gathering of Christian leaders—seminarians, faith-based community workers and volunteers,

doctoral students, leaders of theological schools, congregations and church-related organizations.

Together they explored why an active faith matters. They discerned their role in inspiring and supporting a new generation to shape the future of the church, the academy and local communities. And they imagined a more

hopeful future.

*Imagine a hopeful future.* What could be more important to our world right now?

Staggering tragedies and brutality have riveted our collective attention. Staten Island. Brooklyn. Ferguson. Baltimore. And the list goes on today. Nine faithful church leaders massacred in Charleston, in their sacred space. African-American churches bombed and burned. Bitter debate about the Confederate flag.

And there's the larger landscape: The growing gaps and social stratifications in economic prosperity. Disparities in educational opportunity. Entrenched poverty. Contestation over marriage equality. The horrors of human trafficking. Environmental degradation. Debates

over immigration reform.

Is this a world where the Christian church steps up and leans in? We think so.

Young people are watching to see how the church will respond, heal and lead in society. They want their faith to matter in the world, to make a difference. If we want them to bring their talents to the church and the academy, we had better take them seriously.

When Christian communities and their leaders have been motivated by an active faith, the church is a relevant and powerful witness. What did we see in Charleston in response to tragedy? Solidarity. Compassion. Seeds of change in community connections.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the role faithful Christian leaders, pastors and scholars played in the Civil Rights movement. Their active faith remains a source of inspiration to a new generation of leaders we engage in our work.

FTE had a deep sense that something new and exciting would happen when this diverse mix of leaders—a microcosm of the whole church and the people of God—gathered at the Christian Leadership Forum.

Here's what we learned:

- The next generation tends to shatter normative assumptions about them based

on their race/ethnicity, ecclesial families, political affiliations and social concerns and engagement.

- An active faith is the defining test of the church and academy's relevance to young leaders who want to impact the world's needs.
- Diverse faith communities need the types of diverse leaders who will expand the practice of ministry and scholarship beyond the walls of the church and campus.
- Learning from diverse perspectives—even when it pushes us out of our comfort zones—is necessary to cultivate the kinds of diverse, faithful leaders that the church, academy and world need now.

Do you—do we—have the eyes to see and the ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to us now?

We must create a more hopeful future for generations to come. And that is why an active faith matters.

I invite you to join the community of faithful, wise and courageous leaders working on behalf of God's people and for peace in the world.



Stephen Lewis  
President, Forum for Theological Exploration

Tyler Sit @TylerSit

"I'm grateful for the people who stood on the streets and squares so I could stand at the podium and pulpit"  
#FTEforum15

Antonio Redd @RevAGRedd

"There is a future that mourns if we do not step into our vocations" - Stephen Lewis #FTEforum15

Hazel M. Cherry @laydeproclaimer

Recognize and honor the prophetic voice beyond its presentation and what makes (us) uncomfortable.  
#HipHopandFaith #FTEforum15



# Thriving: Active Faith in the Wilderness



BY DR. DORI BAKER

Innovators sometimes get very thirsty.

Like wilderness survivors, they get by with a drop of rainwater from a leaf, while searching for the river they know must flow nearby.

Hundreds of such faithful souls found streams of living water at the 2015 FTE Christian Leadership Forum. For one another, they were water, a life-giving substance, refreshing parched places and sustaining a beautiful determination to thrive.

They gathered together from a vast network

of congregations, ministries, service organizations, and institutions of higher education reflected in FTE's growing partnerships.

“How will Christians congregate in that future? How will they share the life-giving sustenance that flows from faith, generation to generation?”

Church planters, campus ministers, and diverse leaders with a particular passion—for

excellent preaching, living liturgy, or creating new pathways to nurture God's justice in community. They believe that "Active Faith Matters." They are doing God's work on the ground.

They came not to be filled up with new information from above, but to awaken deeper wisdom already within.

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“They gathered together from a vast network of congregations, ministries, service organizations, and institutions of higher education.”

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In small groups, idea labs and discernment cafes, young people and older mentors began to design a future together. Not just any future, but one that they would like to inhabit with God and neighbor—a future worthy of their life's investment.

How will Christians congregate in that future? How will they share the life-giving sustenance that flows from faith, generation to generation?

The invitation was that simple and that challenging.

Defining "church" these days, it is easy to

see great loss. Surveys describe "the nones"—those masses of Millennials who've taken a hike from organized religion despite a spiritual hunger. For them, church often looks like outdated structures that reinforce walls, rather than break them down.

Seeing beyond that loss takes courage and imagination.

Those who gathered with FTE in Dallas embodied multiple forms of active faith and new life, springing up in what could be mistaken for dry places. Together they experienced:

- Contemplative worship at a graffiti wall, where the liturgy, to the beat of a DJ, invited them to draw their dreams of racial justice, the end of poverty, and 'kin-dom' of heaven on earth.
- A visioning session in which followers of Christ called out the headlines they want to help shape by 2020, including "Income Gap Narrowing;" "Climate Change Reversed;" "Earth Finally Free of War."
- Hearing United Methodist Bishop Minerva Carcaño's gospel reminder: "If you imagine a circle of the world's most vulnerable children, the closer you get to the center of that circle, the closer you are to Jesus."
- Naming next steps. These include a gathering in Seattle to bring together "cool Christians doing interesting stuff in their basements, so we can see each other;" a gathering in Washington, D.C. to "motivate more young leaders to go outside the norms;" and a dinner in Atlanta, where "ecumenical and multi-racial partners can

seek connections between theology and the issues in their neighborhoods.”

Speaker Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove—leader of the new monastic movement—named a collective leaning. “Maybe the headline can be that all these people who are calling themselves ‘nones’ can discover there’s something else to be calling themselves,” he said. “Maybe you can help them discover it.”

Before going back to the pockets of ministry, scholarship and innovation where they continue to discern God’s call, they paused for a moment. Using ancient tools—a towel, a basin, water, and words—they washed and blessed each other’s hands for God’s work in the world.

These leaders went forth reminded that there are rivers of life that never run dry. They are

as nearby as the new friend who can see your vision or the mentor who first named your gift. Wilderness survivors will get by, and God supplies a beautiful thriving.

*Dori Baker is the Research Fellow for the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE). She is an ordained United Methodist Church elder and the author of several books about faith and vocation to help guide young people and their mentors.*

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““ These leaders went forth reminded that there are rivers of life that never run dry.”

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Linda I. Jiménez @QuirkyChurchGrl

“God has given you the power to bless what is good in the world. Use it!” @wilsonhartgrove #fteforum15

Xavier Lott @XavierLott1867

The intersectionality of JUSTICE must be the conversation and concern of the church! @fteleaders #FTEforum15

## Living into Spaces of Possibility



BY REV. DAVID RAMOS

There we all were, together in one room: the dream weavers and the pragmatists, the thinkers and the feelers, pastors and activists, the subdued and the exuberant, both Boomers and Millennials.

We came to the 2015 FTE Christian Leadership Forum from across the country. We broke bread, bore our souls, bathed our hands in a ritual of commitment, and imagined a possible future for the church and for theological education.

We shared our personal, ecclesial and

professional struggles, our individual pain, and our visions for what the Beloved Community can look like.

The Forum was a model of inclusion. It invited a broad swathe of Christian leaders. From Anglican to Pentecostals, Catholics and Baptists, Quakers and the non-affiliated, all were invited to the table, and our voices were honored. This generous inclusion afforded an opportunity to experience, explore, and enunciate our particularity and difference, as well as mutuality and unity.

One of the greatest contributions of our gathering was the “internarrativity” created by the space and process. By internarrativity, I mean the mutual sharing of our narratives,

and the ability of participants to cross the borders of difference and identification to discover new meaning.

The Forum focused on purposeful dialogue. Narratives converged, difference was acknowledged, commonalities were embraced, and possible futures were explored. This made opportunities for co-creation possible.

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“ This emerging coalition of practitioners, poets, prophets, and priests can be a ‘force multiplier,’ one that leads the way to true change.”

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As we prepared to depart, we shared a communal moment in time. We washed and blessed one another’s hands for God’s work in the world—experiencing the Spirit of Pentecost along with its diversity, power, and sacred speaking in many tongues.

A graceful resonance ensued. Individuals risked sharing their pain, their hopes, their struggles, and their fears. Whether it was the sharing of the historical pain of discrimination, the crucible of responsibility and leadership, or the anxiety of discerning vocational decisions, people stood in solidarity and support of one another. We had ample opportunities to give and to receive, to share and to listen,

to emote and to be empathetic.

The future of the church, academy and creative community work will lie in our abilities to conduct such meaningful dialogue. This dialogue must happen along an axis that intersects with diversity, multiplicity and inter-narrative conversations.

New initiatives, generative partnerships, and creative problem solving will result. This emerging coalition of practitioners, poets, prophets, and priests can be a “force multiplier,” one that leads the way to true change.

The FTE Forum wasn’t just inspirational. It created real opportunities for support, networking and mentoring. It even offered the possibility of resources for innovative initiatives that emerge from youth, church partnerships, and ministerial organizations—efforts to cultivate the leadership skills of people who impact the issues and needs of diverse communities.

As we take on the daunting challenges that confront the church, the academy and our world, I left the Forum feeling encouraged and fortified—a gift received by sharing my story, listening to the stories of others, and living into the spaces of possibility.

*David Ramos is president of the Latino Leadership Circle ([www.latinoleadershipcircle.org](http://www.latinoleadershipcircle.org)). The organization supports Christ-centered circles of emerging leaders who engage the world and serve as catalysts for personal and community transformation.*



**Mark Husbands** @churchdogmatics Eules, TX

“When you see a problem you may get to a point when you have to stop thinking about it and do something about it” Rosa Parks #FTEForum15



**Shakei Haynes** @ShakeiHaynes

“Active faith grows from the ground up when it lets suffering speak” -Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove #FTEforum15



**Emily McGinley** @thepemily

Let justice roll down...a mighty river is formed when small streams come together for a common purpose. @wilsonhartgrove #FTEforum15



## Active Faith, Active Diversity



BY TYLER SIT

In our increasingly globalized age, it is clear that an active faith means actively creating and leading faith spaces that

are racially diverse. A much more difficult question, though, is the matter of how.

This is a particularly pertinent question to church planters like me who hope to start a multi-ethnic congregation!

Fortunately for me—and for everyone who was there—the FTE Christian Leadership Forum came at just the right time. The Forum brought together a rich diversity of

young adults, including conservative white evangelicals, black liberationists, Latina mujeristas, and Asian church planters.

“The Forum leaders chose integrity over tokenizing, and its authenticity rang true.”

The Forum was an incarnated model of how active faith necessarily leads to active diversity. For the sake of my church plant and for the future of God’s church in the world, here are some observations on how the Forum

achieved an engaged and active diversity.

Perhaps most important to the Forum's success was that everyone came in expecting to find and connect with a diverse mix of people—and had prepared themselves for it. FTE attracts people who are confident enough in their own racial and theological identities that they can engage with others in meaningful ways. This sparks the chance of success from the start.

This type of anticipation of diversity, however, is markedly different from the approach of many churches.

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“The bold diversity at the FTE Forum came from a self-selecting group that decided that this type of event is a faithful part of developing as a Christian leader.”

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Common practice in local ministry is a “come as you are” invitation that holds few standards. It is too-often a guise for a more desperate message of, “Please just come to church!”

In contrast, the bold diversity at the FTE

Forum came from a self-selecting group that decided that this type of event is a faithful part of developing as a Christian leader. It is significant that people applied to be in the Forum.

They did not just wander in because they were available. It took a dedicated effort. By the time folks arrived, they were ready to abide by a community covenant and to sit at dinner tables with people who look very different from them.

Notably, the leaders of the Forum showed *from the start* that diversity is the rule or foundation of effective engagement and connection. Our speakers, our worship, and our small groups all modeled meaningful dialogue. The Forum leaders chose integrity over tokenizing, and its authenticity rang true.

Now, was the Forum perfect? No, and I don't believe it could ever be before the coming of God's Kin-dom. But it nonetheless taught this church planter some important lessons for creating a church—and a world—where God's diverse children can commune fruitfully.

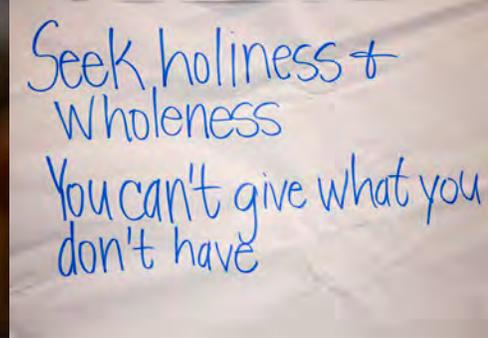
*Tyler Sit is a church planter in Minneapolis, MN. You can follow his journey toward building a church that focuses on environmental racial justice—working at the intersection of race, ecology and the environment—at [www.aplacetostart.church](http://www.aplacetostart.church). Tyler is a 2012 FTE Fellow and an active FTE blogger.*

Emily McGinley @thepemily

Who do we belong to?  
Where are we going? I  
hope we are going to  
a world where all are  
seen as the beloved of  
God. @bishopminerva  
#FTEforum15

J.H. Hill Jr. @jhilljr Fort Worth, TX

We often see God work,  
not in easy ways but,  
rather, in profoundly  
unsettling ways.  
#FTEforum15



## Time for Systemic Change



BY REV. DR. SHERYL A.  
KUJAWA-HOLBROOK

**H**ow might we create conditions for scholars and students of color to thrive in the academy?

We must answer—and act on—this question.

At the 2015 FTE Christian Leadership Forum, I witnessed the great potential of theological education. At the same time, I heard stories of struggle from scholars and students of color about the racism they face in their academic environments.

The very history of Western Christianity—and the current escalation of racist violence in our society—reinforces the oppression experienced by scholars and students of color on a daily basis. If racism pervades theological education, how are we to transform ourselves and impact our wider communities?

Theological education is facing a crisis with complex causes. Many theological schools are challenged to find the resources to cover their budgets. This is especially true in an age where it is necessary to offer a variety of delivery systems and specialties to attract students. Faculty feel stretched within under-resourced schools as they strive to balance their mentoring, teaching, research, and administrative workloads.

Too often, the strategy of support for scholars and students of color is reduced to workshops on diversity. Instead, a comprehensive support strategy should be seen as integral to the vocation of theological education. One reason so many multicultural initiatives fail is that white institutional cultures do not recognize or have the will within their pressured environments to correct deep power imbalances. These deep imbalances exist in many theological schools.

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“ We must examine our schools on the systemic and structural levels.”

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The generative thinking required to re-imagine theological education without racism can easily be postponed when institutions are stuck in survival mode.

But theological education is an embodied practice. Many educational settings focus almost solely on the cognitive study of religion. In contrast, theological educators ground theology in the diverse social identities and local contexts that comprise the human community.

If our institutions are called on to respond to a world groaning under the weight of injustice, how can we do so without addressing our own broken relationships?

We must examine our schools on the systemic and structural levels. We must be willing to “walk the talk” or we will lose what moral authority we have left—and the injustices of racism will continue.

I left the Forum feeling reinvigorated by this realization: creating the conditions that will allow scholars and students of color to thrive is a long-term commitment whose time has come.

I am a white faculty member and administrator from a school with numerical diversity. My institution shares the challenges faced by many schools—but we also have opportunities for constructive change.

What are the primary ingredients of this long-term commitment for us? Insights from our history, collaborative and strategic leadership, a rich symbolic life, deep community partnerships, and spiritual stamina. We must also create an action plan with ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and discernment.

As President Obama has noted, “Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we have been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.”

*Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, CA ([www.cst.edu](http://www.cst.edu)), where she also serves as professor of Practical Theology.*



**Rimes McElveen** @TheFollowship  
FTE president Stephen Lewis quoting Peter Block this morning: “If you want to change the future then change the conversation.”  
#FTEforum15

**Andre.** @PerfectingDre  
Justice is not exclusive.  
Justice is inclusive. All issues matter. What affects one, affects all.  
#FTEforum15

## In Solidarity



BY HELEN JIN KIM

**M**any of us come to the study of religion because of a crisis of faith.

One of my first crises of faith was as a college freshman. I stood on the picket line in Los Angeles’ Koreatown with other justice-hungry undergrads. We protested a Korean-owned supermarket’s failure to pay its Latino workers a living wage. Ironically, the supermarket provided Sunday church services for their workers.

Witnessing a commitment to piety without justice drove me to ask hard questions: Does religion provide a prophetic critique of injustice

or is it, as Marx suggests, an “opiate of the masses”? Given the promise of eternal life in the Christian tradition, is there room for active faith in this world? How do we love across, and break down, sinful systems of stratification by race, class, gender and sexuality?

These questions have perennially followed me, and reemerged at the 2015 FTE Christian Leadership Forum.

I was inspired by this timely gathering across racial lines, as I joined in conversation with other Black, Latin@ and Asian FTE Doctoral Fellows writing their dissertations. The fragmentation of racial minorities is commonplace, a disturbing consequence of the ideology of white supremacy, which breeds

misunderstanding, exploitation and violence between communities of color.

At the Forum, however, we swam upstream in a time when it is easier to be divided by, and subservient to, the American idol of whiteness. We shared our joys and challenges in the academy, and discussed the resonances we find in African American blues and the Korean theology of *han*, a bitter melancholy in the face of unresolved injustice. We had fruitful, and sometimes tense, discussions regarding interracial alliances, which are fragile, often partial, and require vigilance and generosity to forge and maintain.

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“We need each other’s eyes and voices.”

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Yet in our “Black Lives Matter” moment in the aftermath of Charleston, I am more convinced that solidarity across racial lines is necessary. The alternative—racial fragmentation—fractures our understanding of what we are battling in this nation as black bodies are policed, terrorized and murdered. We need each other’s eyes and voices to discuss how to divest from, and dismantle, the nation’s “racial caste system”—as Michelle Alexander calls it—which perpetuates such violence.<sup>1</sup>

It was precisely because of our Forum conversations that I was reminded that the racial caste system in the U.S. works in savvy ways, not only pitting blacks against whites, but also triangulating Asian Americans in service of hierarchy.

One of the seemingly benign ways that Americans invest in this racial hierarchy is in uncritically accepting Asian Americans as the model minority. The fantasy of Asian Americans as the paragon of minority success perpetuates the pathologization of blackness and justifies the public neglect of Asian American need. The stereotype misrecognizes Asian Americans as an assimilated, problem-less people, and—according to professor and author Scott Kurashige—the antithesis of blackness.

“Black Lives Matter” necessitates the demythologization of the model minority.

When scholars and practitioners of religion meet across racial lines, I believe we open up spaces to brainstorm how to conquer the Goliath of white supremacy—not purely by might, but by faith, through wisdom, and in solidarity.

*Helen Jin Kim is a doctoral student at Harvard University ([www.harvard.edu](http://www.harvard.edu)), where her area of study is the History of Christianity and American Religions. She is a 2015 and 2010 FTE Fellow.*

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<sup>1</sup>“Racial caste system” is Michelle Alexander’s term. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2012.

Emily McGinley @thepemily

Theology @ sunset reflects & asks, "How did we work for justice today?" then turns to scripture to plan for tomorrow. @bakerdori #FTEforum15

FTE @fteleaders

What does a world without active faith leaders look like? #FTEforum15

Quantisha Mason @blackseminarian

To do justice we have to step out of our comfort zone and fear not being the stranger #micah6:8 #FTEforum15



## Active Faith for The Beloved Community



BY LYDIA WYLIE-KELLERMANN

Noise filled the room. You could hear the passion rising up.

I was in the middle of an exercise at the 2015 FTE Christian Leadership Forum. The exercise was based on the "Theatre of the Oppressed," pioneered by Brazilian Augusto Boal.

I looked to the different corners of the room, which represented race and the education system, sexuality in the church, gender exclusion, and "Black Lives Matter."

I stood with a group of strangers who would

soon place their bodies in symbolic work against urban gentrification. To create a tableau that represented gentrification, we

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“You could hear the passion rising up.”

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knew right away that we needed some folks to be brutally pushed out. Then we needed to represent young, hip folks who rejoice at low housing costs and great culture. Lastly, we needed a "tier," which we created up on chairs, to puppeteer and orchestrate the whole thing—representing corporate interests.

We began the second part of the exercise, when onlookers are asked to become part of the tableau. They cannot move us or change us, but they can place their bodies in the picture to demonstrate the work of justice. I broke my “freeze” and role as a young gentrifier to glimpse the changes these people made. I was immediately moved to tears.

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“Such are the roles of justice and love. This is what active faith asks of us.”

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A woman stood beside me, looking into my eyes, and directing me to see the people who were being pushed down out of sight. A man stood with his face filled with anger, pointing to the puppets—exposing the powers that lingered overhead. Two others placed their bodies between those who were pushing the folks to the ground. Another crouched on the ground besides the bodies being victimized, holding onto their hands.

I look at those who have joined our tableau seeing a variety of roles, which included relationship building, history telling, naming and exposing power and principalities, nonviolent intervention, and solidarity with our hearts and bodies.

Such are the roles of justice and love. This is what active faith asks of us.

This Forum exercise resonated deeply with me. Born, raised, and vocationally committed to Detroit, I have watched as the city is systemically and violently taken from the hands and homes of the people with history here—and then given over to people who look like me: white folks in their 20s and 30s.

A man who is part of my congregation and sleeps in the doorway of a school was recently brutally beaten with a baseball bat. His attacker told him, “I am going to drag you into the river. You don’t deserve to live.” At the same time, tens of thousands of homes are having their water shut off—and with overdue notices tacked on to their rising tax bills, the owners are being driven out by foreclosure.

Gentrification matters. It matters in the way I live, the rent I pay, if and how I buy a home, who my neighbors are, and how I interact with the enormous white privilege I carry. It matters to my faith.

When I looked around the room at the people I had met, I knew that each of us is called to different work, bearing different gifts. No gift is more important than any other, yet each is crucial to the building of the Beloved Community.

*Lydia Wylie-Kellermann is the national coordinator of Word and World ([www.wordandworld.org](http://www.wordandworld.org)). She is a writer and activist focused on urban agriculture, intentional community and nonviolent resistance.*



**Xavier Lott** @XavierLott1867

The best way to predict the future, is to create it!  
@fteleader #FTEforum15

**Sierra K.** @uONseeAIRah

Headline: "Churches open their doors to (insert the forgotten here)."  
#FTEforum15

**Dori Baker** @bakerdori

Jesus is the word for what happens when people experience freedom. Overheard at the #FTEforum15



# The Sonic Dimension of Vocation

*After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you."*

—Matthew 26:73 (NRSV)



BY REV. ZACH MILLS

Imagine the accusation surprised Peter. He had just dodged two charges naming him as Jesus' accomplice. Both charges relied on visual evidence. People claimed they had seen Peter with Jesus. This third accusation, however, relied on sonic evidence.

Peter could deny the integrity of eyewitness testimony. But he couldn't deny the particular

vibrations his voice was making and had already made in the world.

Since Peter's accent sounded like the accent of Jesus, who was also from Galilee, the conclusion is that Peter knows Jesus and—in light of reports that he'd been seen with Jesus—that Peter must also be his disciple. Peter did sound like Jesus. The evidence was irrefutable.

Can you see, or rather hear, the rich possibilities in the metaphor of a Gospel-inflected vocational vernacular?! It can inspire us to approach our vocations anew.

The first night of the 2015 FTE Christian Leadership Forum, Stephen Lewis, FTE's president,

invited us to imagine what the world we aspire to create looks like. Since then, I've wondered also what this world sounds like. Sound, I've concluded, shapes identity as much as—if not more than—sight.

Sound is how we first experience the world. For about nine months we each live within the hypersonic environment of our mothers' wombs. In this acoustic space, we are enveloped and interact with soundscapes from a world we have not yet seen.

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“The church and the academy must teach a new generation to sound differently!”

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Similarly, during each day at the FTE Forum, I witnessed how sounds begin to affect identity. These sounds hovered over lunch tables, saturated workshops, and guided conversations. They were the sounds of steady, genuine, tenacious connections with others. Unsolicited affirmations. Radical listening. Shared laments. Brave confessions. Liberating tears. Renewed hopes. Audacious dreams.

These were the featured songs on the Forum's soundtrack—aural portals briefly sampling the new world soundscapes our ministries will one day compose. These were the unrepentant accents of active faith!

Have we considered the impact the sonic dimension of our vocations might make in the world? How might our writing, teaching, preaching, and activism sonically imprint God's radical abundance on others?

How might our vocational accents affect people so deeply that their only motivation for entering an African American church—or any space where they represent some minority—is to commune more vulnerably with the sublimely unfamiliar to know God more fully?

The church and the academy must teach a new generation to sound differently! And we must sound differently!

May the sounds ricocheting from our vocations teach people that they are important, wanted, and loved—that their lives matter.

May the aural footprints of our vocations be relentless rhythmic patterns of love, holding us together before sending us further.

May our scholarly intonations ripple across time and space, announcing that we are bold, unapologetic co-conspirators with the One who is able to do more than we can imagine.

For the sake of the new world we would create ... may our accents betray us!

*Zach Mills is a doctoral student and 2015 FTE Fellow at Northwestern University ([www.northwestern.edu](http://www.northwestern.edu)) in Evanston, IL. His area of study is Rhetoric and Public Culture.*

# 2015 FTE Christian Leadership Forum Closing Prayer

BY HASSAN HENDERSON,  
MOREHOUSE COLLEGE STUDENT

*“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.”*

**M**y God we thank you for keeping us, for sustaining us, and for bringing us to this place, even for a time such as this. You have brought us, you have empowered us.

*Each of us is endowed with the power of the Holy Ghost. We are equipped with the tools necessary to fulfill our roles as co-creators with you, and to build a better home, a house, oh God, that we might build even a better world. A world in which your omnipresence can be made manifest and your glory be evident. A world, oh God, in which sisters and brothers walk hand in hand, up and down the street of failure and success, trial and triumph, tests and treasures, a world in which communal-unity is made evident and all become one, and one in you.*

*So teach us, oh God. Teach us that we might walk in the light of your wisdom, and that we might talk in the knowledge and understanding of your spirit of loving kindness. Teach us, that we might grasp the reality of humanity's oneness with you, for you, by you, as you, in you. We seek to understand the divinity within all of humanity, that we may be able to embody the true character of the Christ, and honestly and earnestly love our neighbor as ourselves. Not only the man or woman we can relate to, but that man or woman who stands outside of the realm of our own social constructs and privileges. Open the eyes of our hearts, Lord!*

*God, as we take on the great art of becoming, we understand that the road to our vocation and scholarship will not be one of ease, so we ask that you would keep us, and we know we shall be kept. For we must fulfill—as the world stands in need of men and women who have accepted this our perpetual call—this call to be all that you, our creator have ordained us to be. We now open our mind, our hearts, and our spirits to receive these truths.*

*It is in the name and the nature of the Christ that I do release this prayer; let all who affirm it in word and action say, Amen!*

Listen to Hassan Henderson recite the full closing prayer at [soundcloud.com/fteleaders](https://soundcloud.com/fteleaders).

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