WE WILL LEAD CHANGE FOR GOOD TO:

Build community → Share abundance → Feed the hungry → Care for others → Enliven pastoral ministry → Instill hope → Design inclusive worship → Support rising scholars of color → Serve the “least” → Advance diversity in theological education → Inspire servant leadership → Train future Christian leaders → Help people find their calling → Create affordable housing → Teach the Bible → Spark campus ministries → Speak faithful truth to power → Be the heart, hands and feet of Christ in the world → Empower women and girls → Heal hurting hearts → End extreme poverty → Cast new light on Scripture → Be in community beyond the walls of the church → Stop institutional racism → Reduce the infant mortality rate → Live with purpose → Do God’s will → Mediate peace → Promote environmental stewardship → Organize job training for differently-abled sisters and brothers → Visit prisoners → Volunteer for faith-based service → Improve access to health care for low-income earners → Listen to diverse voices → Build bridges of understanding → Promote fair wages & safe working conditions → House the homeless → Educate youth and adults → Comfort the sick and mourning → Transform lives → Help city schools thrive → Connect campus & community → Launch new youth ministries → Stand for justice → Work for peace → Stop street violence → Launch social enterprises → Care for the planet → Work in food pantries → Nurture discernment → Care for elders → Minister to addiction → Dismantle discrimination → Create safe space for questions → Educate and inspire → Welcome the stranger → Create safe cities → Strengthen families → Increase mutual understanding → Show mercy → Improve global relationships → Fight human trafficking → Help communities thrive → Inspire social entrepreneurs → Strengthen social networks → Work for the good of all → Look for common ground → Generate generosity → Partner with the Spirit → Engage others → Convene holy conversations → Value differences → Bring equity to the marginalized → Equip people for ministry → DO GOD’S WORK IN THE WORLD
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Insights from the 2017 Forum

Be inspired by insights that contributors gained during this year’s FTE Christian Leadership Forum.

- Mentor, peer, and faculty relationships are critical to my professional and personal life
- We need to curate social movements as church
- Privilege has prophetic possibilities if we use it to save lives
- The church is a living, complex system
- Racism is a sin, including silence on racist social structures
- My sense of “imposter syndrome” is a common experience
- Support and productive challenge in relationships make me a better scholar and human being
- We need to always be aware of who is not in the room, and why they’re not there
- God chooses to be embodied in places of pain
- I want to mentor others in my cultural context
- In leading change for good, we need to recover church as a movement
- I want to be a force for Indigenous liberation and healing
- We still need institutions, but they must be institutions with a social imagination
- Healthy ecology can only be built on diversity
- The hope for transformation is in the resurrection
- Listen to your neighbors, they will tell you how to heal them
- In the age of globalization, we need one place where we can live a witnessed life in community
- Death of a system is not failure; it is participation in God’s good and evolving creation
- Scholarship is a tool that enlivens the church and reminds it of its role in society
- There is no community without God
- When Jesus instructed his disciples to preach the good news, what he intended was a social movement
- It’s important that we recognize our privilege and decide what we will do with our power before we get it
- Remember that our ancestral communities inform the people we are today
- If we didn’t have the institutional church, we’d have to reinvent it
- We need communities to incubate social imagination
This year marks the 500th anniversary of the Christian Reformation. It marked a radical shift in the church across Europe, and ultimately around the world.

This reformation stands in a long, rich, Judeo-Christian tradition of bringing about change for good or the betterment of the community. Pentecost was a reformation of another kind and a forerunner to Martin Luther’s call to reformation. It gave birth to the early church, a grassroots movement that redistributed and democratized God’s Spirit among all who are followers of the Way of Jesus.

In light of all that is happening in our society and communities, maybe it is time for another reformation—to lead change for good, right here and right now.

That was our focus at the 2017 FTE Christian Leadership Forum. Diverse and creative Christian leaders of many ages and traditions, from a multitude of places and points of view, gathered to distill the essence of what it means for Christians to lead change for good in the world today.
We focused on this theme because we all long to see a new heaven and earth—a vision of a more hopeful future and a just and equitable world. We long to see more of our communities, organizations and people, including the least among us—the marginalized, vulnerable and invisible—flourish and experience the promise and potential of a more abundant life. While these deep longings manifest differently in our different contexts, one thing is certain. These longings only come about with change, and when we all work together to lead change for good.

Young adults, church and other faith leaders, doctoral students, and scholars convened in Atlanta to discover and create opportunities to do the good work of God in our churches, classrooms, communities and cities. These leaders are poised to bring actionable love to life—through the different ways that Christians congregate and launch new experiments, partnerships, and social enterprise.

Leading change for good is not some slogan or idealistic nonsense. It is hard work. It is where people discover that they themselves must change, and must think and live differently with others to make change happen.

Jesus tells us that we can actually do this! In fact, God urges us to do it, in partnership with divine love and on behalf of the common good.

This is the good news Jesus speaks about in Luke 4:18-19 when he says the Spirit of the Lord is upon him. As followers of the Way, we too are called to engage the same Spirit of the Lord, who is upon all of us, to manifest the reign-dom of God’s love and hope in communities and cities throughout the world.

In the spirit of opening ourselves to the changes God seeks through us, let us aim to lead change for good in theological education, within our faith communities, and in the spaces and places where love might transform us all.

May it be so!

Stephen Lewis
President, Forum for Theological Exploration
Where Are the Mentors?

BY KATHLEEN BRAAFLADT

“Where are the mentors?”

This question is my constant companion as I navigate the unchartered waters of the next great emergence in the Christian church.

As a pastor and mentor for young adults discerning their vocational call, I take seriously my task to provide experiences that will facilitate their ability to hear God’s call upon their lives. But I have a nagging sense that whatever experiences I can currently provide in my congregational setting will fall short of what realistically will unfold in the next few decades in the church.

I posed that question in a small group during the 2017 FTE Christian Leadership Forum. I was turned upside down by the response.

“Perhaps what we need is an internship for pastors, mentored by young leaders,” someone replied.

That’s when I realized what is so inspiring about this annual gathering.

The Forum creates a space where I am being mentored by young, creative voices both inside and outside of the church! Here I find a sea of
rich, diverse voices, passionate about healing the world and living out the kingdom’s values. Having lamented the current state of the institutional church, I’ll never forget a young leader who stood up in a session and said, “I want to run out into the streets of Atlanta and say, ‘Don’t worry, we are working on it.’”

One session, *Living, Dying, and Leading Change*, was about established and emerging systems of influence. I was given new eyes and a new vision for me and for my congregation’s role in providing resources and mentoring for emerging models of ministry.

“*Where are the mentors?’*”

They are not only those from *within* the church who dare to imagine a different kind of future. They are also the executives of nonprofits and business leaders, experienced in coordinating resources, adapting to change, and taking risks.

And, yes, I left the Forum feeling like there is a place for seasoned pastors who are skilled at inspiring generosity and trusted enough to lead others into a different future.

“I have a nagging sense that whatever experiences I can currently provide in my congregational setting will fall short of what realistically will unfold in the next few decades in the church.”

“What are the mentors?”

I last saw them at the FTE Forum in Atlanta, but I’m beginning to understand they are everywhere in our communities, beyond the walls of my own church.

Mentors can be found in the least likely of places. We need all of them.

I am eager to lead change for good in ways that will enable my congregation to see an abundance of resources inside and outside the doors of our church. God has already placed possibilities and connections in each community that will promote our shared values of healing and liberation for the world.

*Kathleen Braafladt* is co-pastor of Messiah Lutheran Church in Vancouver, WA. She leads change for good by mentoring, offering pastoral internships, and growing new church plants in the Northwest.
Among doctoral colleagues at the 2017 FTE Christian Leadership Forum, it quickly became clear that the differences between us were mainly our institutional affiliations and programs of study.

We learned we share a common experience. We are people of color in predominately white male-dominated academic institutions. We are pursuing doctoral degrees for our professional development and on behalf of our families and communities.

A desire to lead change for good is the driving force behind each of us. In subtle and not-so-subtle ways we have been challenged to shrink in the face of power or remain silent in the face of injustice. Our stories differ, but our frustrations are the same.

I came to understand that the historical challenges faced by people of color bind us together. So do our difficulties with professors or classmates who question the validity of our scholarship. As I looked in the faces of my doctoral colleagues and listened to their testimonies, I saw discontent. I saw anger.

I heard exasperation with navigating systems that remind people of color that we are often not welcome in academic spaces. The conversation was messy, real, and unfiltered. Disgust stirred in
Hope allowed me to witness resilience and grace radiating from within each person seated at the table. I heard fortitude bubbling from our inner core. I saw renewed fire in our eyes. I also discerned a commitment to faithful practices that support our mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. I felt passion and responsibility to what our scholarship will bring to academia, to the church, to our community, and to the world. There is a shared internal compass directing us towards prophetic scholarship.

We learned that we are not alone. Not only are we surrounded by a cloud of ancestral witnesses cheering us on to completion, but there are allies physically walking next to us.

This common space allowed us to collectively reflect on why we are engaged in doctoral studies and what our experiences have been. We mapped out plans for successful degree completion and drafted our teaching philosophies.

We left the Forum knowing—as the prophet Elijah learned—that there are others on the front lines of institutions and cities who have not bowed down to capitalism, prejudice, racism, sexism, or exclusion.

We have not and will not bow to the will of institutions if it means divesting our personal, ancestral, or communal power.

I will lead change for good as a Pastor-Scholar and Public Speaker. I will preach, teach and write about how local faith-based organizations can be agents of sustainable change within their immediate contexts. I will create a space where the church is seen as a center for community development.

Dawrell Rich is pursuing a doctoral degree in religion and society at Drew University in Madison, NJ. He leads for change in urban revitalization, community development, ecology, and work to end global poverty.
Earlier this year, I was nominated to attend FTE’s Regional Discernment Retreat. To be invited back to attend the 2017 FTE Christian Leadership Forum was, I think, God’s way of letting me know, “We’re not done yet.”

I found myself in a dynamic setting that for three days fueled my mind and stirred my soul in ways that only the Holy Spirit could.

The question that was most prominent at the Forum was, “How can we lead change for good?” That question made me ponder if I have led change for good up to this point in my life.

Sure, I serve as a youth leader at my church in New York City. But have I successfully integrated into my life the teachings and values received from the Word of God or from my pastor? Have I absorbed the wisdom of my church’s elders? And have I taken those teachings and values—and the wisdom—to the outside world?

I deeply contemplated these questions at the Forum. Together we explored Galatians 6:9, “Let us not become weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” This became a focal point for me.

In his sermon, The Prophetic Possibilities of Privilege, the Reverend Dr. Heber Brown III stated that we must make a choice to not lose sight of the
altar at the center of our lives. In the midst of our trials, seasons, and rejections, we must always look for our altar, and stand on its foundation.

I began to discern that the work I have done so far is not enough. God seeks for us to dig our hands into the soil, and to actively show up for others who would least expect us to be there for them. The recognition of our privilege in life is not enough. We must take action to help others.

What I take back into my community has immeasurable value. The Forum provided a shared space for teachers, faith leaders, and young adults whose hearts are on fire for God. To collectively come together as one body—regardless of race, age, gender, and spirituality—was an immense blessing.

I would like to lead change for good by uniting diverse groups of people in ways that they can mutually engage, discuss, and explore paths toward positive changes in our world.

**Bella Polanco** leads change for good as a youth leader at Third Church Disciples of Christ in New York City. She serves as a Sunday school teacher, worship team member, and secretary of the church’s leadership committee.

“To collectively come together as one body—regardless of race, age, gender, and spirituality—was an immense blessing.”
As speaker Ched Myers said of our time together at the FTE Christian Leadership Forum, “Spaces like this don’t fall from the sky, not in this culture.”

I was fortunate to attend the Forum at a time when I deeply needed a space for shared wisdom, relational support, challenge, affirmation, and healing.

I heard from awe-inspiring leaders from diverse backgrounds and considered my own call to ministry alongside my peers. In my Young Adult Cohort, I appreciated the chance to reflect daily on our insights and to learn what inspired or exasperated my peers.

Some voiced that there are more specific needs in their home communities beyond what the Forum had time to explore. Others noted how pressing events often require immediate action—such as solidarity with Standing Rock water protectors—when there’s no time to wait for institutions to change their policies. These conversations added intellectual and emotional depth.

The Forum gave me intergenerational, intercultural, and interdenominational access to leaders within the broader Christian church. It was important to hear from other committed young leaders who live at the intersection of Christian
The Forum gave me intergenerational, intercultural, and interdenominational access to leaders within the broader Christian church.

faith and work for social justice. It was life-giving to receive gifts of wisdom and artistic expression from doctoral candidates and their mentors, and to learn from older people who have spent their lives in ministry leading change for good. They are living examples of a great cloud of witnesses. They give me faith that the struggle is worth it, that there can be joy along the way, and that I don’t have to try to do it all at once.

Perhaps the greatest gift I received was a renewed joy and encounter with God’s Spirit through worship and preaching done in styles different than what I’m accustomed to in my home congregation. While I cherish the Mennonite tradition of four-part hymn singing, I don’t remember the last time I felt as uplifted as I did in joining my voice with the rest of the Forum worship team. I also encountered God’s presence powerfully in the preaching of the Reverend Dr. Heber Brown III; his delivery and interaction are unlike anything I have ever experienced.

I left the Forum feeling inspired, knowing that I am not alone in the call to lead positive change through Christian ministry. In fact, I have great company!

I hope to pursue a Master of Divinity degree, and to build bridges of better understanding between social justice movements and more traditional church communities. This includes educating other white people about how privilege and power impact their view of faith and about the need for change in the church.

Isaiah Friesen recently graduated from Goshen College in Goshen, IN, with a double major in peace, justice and conflict studies, and Spanish. He leads change for good in social justice, environmental stewardship, and the Mennonite Church USA.
Awakening Possibilities, Deploying Imagination

BY LISA A. DELLINGER

It was daunting to enter a space focused on my vocation with “vocational laryngitis.”

 Everywhere, the hum of voices filled the air. Voices in conversation, snippets overheard about lives, work, laughter, sorrows, aspirations, calling, and faith. This was the sound of the Spirit moving in the midst of community at the 2017 FTE Christian Leadership Forum.

I found myself not surprised to hear that the opening worship service invoked the Pentecost. That remembrance of the coming of the fiery Spirit to illuminate and to challenge seemed appropriate to more than just the liturgical calendar.

We as scholars, activists, laity, and educators of color had gathered to explore ways to “lead change for good” in a world where change itself can be chaotic, disorientating, and even hostile. The Spirit entered the space to stir and awaken possibilities for embodying a beloved community.

I reflected on my need for community in the academy. I listened deeply to stories that differed from my own but also felt familiar. I recognized common feelings of isolation, frustration, joy, passion, and hope. Discernment and the struggle to live a balanced life were common threads as we explored key questions: Where do you come from to this calling? Who are you accountable to in this work? What problems do you wrestle with? What do you hope to gain in
The academy and church are changing, and so imagination is needed to deal with the cyclical nature of all things.

The process of speaking out loud my call to the academy and the pulpit, my accountability to Native American Indian Christians, and my questions about how to achieve liberation from settler colonization helped me to gain greater clarity about my plans for life after the Ph.D. program.

I could sense the Spirit calling us to do good by deploying our imagination, and by connecting our writing, teaching, and communities to create a flourishing life.

The academy and church are changing, and so imagination is needed to deal with the cyclical nature of all things.

New systems of radical equity, compassionate community, and healing justice are “prophetic possibilities” that the Reverend Dr. Heber Brown III highlighted in his sermon, reminding us that we can emerge from our places of “privilege”.

I left the Forum with a greater sense of my own agency. Connecting with others, I understood how each of us has our specific role in community.

The Spirit of Life is calling us to stand where we are in the academy, the church, and the world to proclaim our willingness to side with the least privileged, while prophetically insisting upon the integrity of all Creation.

I choose to lead change for good by implementing my scholarship, teaching, and mentoring as a theologian and preacher to help Indigenous and other diverse communities imagine into being a renewed Pentecost of beloved community with justice.

**Lisa Dellinger** is a doctoral student in theology, ethics and history at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL. She leads change for good in Native Christian theology, the United Methodist Church, and the Chickasaw Nation.
I was not quite sure what to expect at the 2017 FTE Christian Leadership Forum, but I anticipated spiritual refreshment and renewal. Through my encounters there with seasoned and emerging clergy and academicians, I left invigorated by the energy, vision, diversity, authenticity, spirituality and reflective engagement of the church of the past evolving toward its future.

The Forum enabled an intertwining of doctoral students, church leaders, young adults and wise leaders. The symphony of voices engaged in Pentecost season inspired listening and speaking to explore possibilities and awaken ideas for impacting communities.

The focus on “leading change for good” revitalized my awareness that the future of Christianity is resplendent with contagious hope.

Idea lab and peer leaders exemplified informed passion for their vocations in Christian service. They shared candidly and with deliberate intention. Intellectual engagement and inspirational worship partnered in enlivening the mind and spirit.

Each session offered its own possibilities for information and inspiration, guided by the inclusivity of welcoming space for the diversity of people and perspectives.

One particular session—Living, Dying, and
Leading Change—modeled a takeaway for the multiple settings of my ministry. These settings are the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College, the church where I serve as a co-pastor, and the community.

I have recently experienced a variety of personal and professional challenges. Perhaps that is why Living, Dying, and Leading Change enlivened a new perspective. It gave me renewed understanding and appreciation for the cycles of life that exist in all aspects of creation, including the evolving church and its work in the world.

I left the Forum encouraged and motivated.

With this experience, I carry a new awareness and expanded capacity to reflect and take action in the varied settings along the continuum of my multiple ministries.

I now plan to host creative and open dialogue to aid organizational self-reflection in each ministry setting. The exchange of ideas will identify the unique assets and alliances available to their mission-centered evolving. The actions that result will reflect their unique God-given potential.

I will remember that at any given moment, together with others, I can have an impact as I seek to “lead change for good.”

Terry Farrell Walker Sr. is director of chapel relations at the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta. He leads change for good as an ordained Baptist minister engaged in worship, music, higher education, community development, philanthropy, and strengthening marriages and families.
My trip to Atlanta was challenging. The plane I was on was scheduled to land at the same time that thunderstorms were active in the area. The turbulence and disruption that we as passengers experienced is an excellent metaphor for what some students and scholars experience in theological education these days.

Being tossed about by strong wind currents, circling the airport, diverting to a nearby city to refuel, and ultimately ending with a safe landing—all called to mind the challenges we face in higher education as we seek to effect institutional change and provide space for doctoral students to thrive.

This was my second FTE Institutional Doctoral Network gathering. The first provided an introduction to collaboration in supporting doctoral students and influencing possible change within our institutions. This year I came prepared to welcome new partners to the network, anticipating that our time together would be informative and motivating. I was not disappointed.

I am aware that the “thunderstorms” at every theological institution do not look and function in the exact same ways. But there are similarities.

Our network identified the currents of issues below the surface. These currents point to visible waves or trends that define common areas of
How do these systems affect doctoral students? What might we learn from a deeper understanding as we seek to increase leverage for change?

I walked away with new tools and the understanding that we live in, according to the Cynefin Framework, a “complex social environment” in which “different situations require different ways of navigation.” I walked away with a renewed sense that teams score higher than individuals every time. Collaboration is the name of the game.

Laced with storytelling, reflection, and imagination-bending activities, our time together was rejuvenating. FTE brought tools and resources into the room to engage both our linear and more creative ways of thinking and doing.

The 2017 network gathering was a reminder that as we “lead change for good,” we have tools we can use to weather the thunderstorms along the journey.

I want to lead change for good through relationships with doctoral students and administrative leaders, exercised in theological education institutions and in collaboration with church leaders. I will encourage stepping away from the status quo to consider new ways of supporting students and engaging church culture.

Belva Brown Jordan is associate dean of curriculum and assessment, and associate professor of the practice of ministry at Claremont School of Theology in Claremont, CA. Reverend Jordan is an ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She leads change for good in organizational dynamics, collaborative leadership, and ministry to racial reconciliation, radical hospitality and creative authenticity.
During the 2017 Christian Leadership Forum a graphic recorder captured big ideas and community conversations through a live drawing of images and words. The drawings below reflect what emerged throughout the gathering among participants inspired to lead change for good.
Looks who’s talking!
Top Tweets from the FTE Christian Leadership Forum

@TamishaTyler Social justice is not a sprint. It is a marathon. The difference in running the two is how you breathe. Learn how to breathe.

@cdmalano We are the spiritual first-responders on the front line. I am with you locking arms for justice. #FTEforum17 @fteleaders @newmanhawaii

@pstamaury Spaces for transformation/change just don’t happen. It takes intentionality, care, courage, and wise use of power. #FTEforum17

@naheartleaps We need prophets who call out the contradictions and progenitors who develop the alternatives. - @mww22

@DavidFTelfort Any problem that only you can solve is not a big enough problem worth working on. @Slewis #FTEforum17 #DreamBig #BigImpact #IdeasForGood

@pubpastor Doing good is about life that is more abundant, not just for some of us, but for all of us. @Slewis #FTEforum17

@msbond2u How often do we self-sabotage our gifts/talents/abilities out of fear of impostor syndrome? Inspired by @naheartleaps #FTEForum17

@RevMama The institution gets treated as the vehicle for revolution. Is there a way for institutions to be deinstitutionalized? #FTEforum17

@Ernest_Speaks “We hear you... and we’re working on it!” Imagine if more people heard this from their faith leaders (and leaders in general). #FTEForum17

@yjromo “Decide what you will do with your power before you have it. Because when you have it, it will be too late.” - René August. #FTEforum17

@BrianBantum “We cannot be a force for good when we ignore our wounds.” Rev August #FTEForum17

@pastormarshall What do you do when you live in the tension between your soul and your role? #FTEforum17

@mww22 Rev. Rene August: For me forgiveness is a matter of making a choice about who I want to be.

@TylerSit “Perhaps composting is Creation’s witness to an empty tomb” @Mattew Williams #FTEforum17