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Laura Cheifetz
lcheifetz@fteleaders.org
404.727.1137

FTE Board of Trustees Announces Fellowship Endowment Funds to Honor Sharon Watson Fluker and Melissa Wiginton

Departing Vice Presidents Led Renewal of Doctoral and Ministry Programs

ATLANTA, January 28, 2011—The Fund for Theological Education (FTE) Board of Trustees has created two new endowment funds to honor departing Vice Presidents Sharon Watson Fluker and Melissa Wiginton for their extraordinary service in leading more than a decade of renewal for the Fund's Doctoral and Ministry Fellowship programs.

The Melissa Wiginton Ministry Fellowship Endowment Fund and The Sharon Watson Fluker Doctoral Fellowship Endowment Fund will support annual fellowships to gifted students preparing to serve in pastoral ministry or theological scholarship.

Wiginton was recently appointed Vice President for Education Beyond the Walls at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, Texas. In March, Fluker will relocate to Boston, where her husband, Dr. Walter Fluker, is the Martin Luther King, Jr. Professor of Ethical Leadership at Boston University School of Theology.

"These fellowships will be an enduring reminder of the vision, creativity and love that Melissa and Sharon devoted to helping a new generation of leaders respond to God's calling in their lives," said FTE Board Chair Florida Smith Ellis.

Fluker and Wiginton joined FTE in 1998. James L. Waits, FTE President Emeritus, appointed them to design initiatives to support future pastors and scholars from diverse backgrounds. In addition to crafting fellowship programs serving 1,500 talented undergraduates, seminarians and doctoral students, Fluker and Wiginton formed national networks of support for them, forging relationships with denominations, congregations, theological schools, colleges and universities, volunteer service groups and higher education organizations. In 2006, with support from Lilly Endowment—which also provides funding for FTE fellowships—the Fund launched its Calling Congregations initiative to equip local churches and organizations with practices and resources to nurture vocational discernment in young people and adults. Stephen Lewis, who served as Calling Congregation's national director, has been named Vice President of Program for FTE.

"Our ability to convene partners across the landscape of faith and leadership springs from a legacy of results," said Peg Birk, FTE Interim President. "While increasing awareness of the need

to support future pastors and scholars, Sharon, Melissa and Stephen cultivated growing interest in the ‘vocation care’ practices that form emerging leaders. They also developed a cadre of highly capable leaders within FTE to direct our programs going forward.”

As Vice President of Program, Lewis is responsible for leading strategy and managing the FTE teams serving fellowships, congregational outreach, communications and other initiatives. In addition to leading Calling Congregations, Lewis previously directed Project Rising Sun, an innovative leadership program for diverse young pastors. He is a former banking officer with experience at Moody’s Investors’ Service and Bank of America. Prior to joining FTE, he was a training manager for the Institute for Church Administration & Management in Atlanta, where he focused on developing business and administrative capacities among clergy and lay leaders. He was a teaching assistant for the Black Church Studies Department at Emory University’s Candler School of Theology while serving as assistant pastor of Trinity Tabernacle Baptist Church in Atlanta. Lewis holds a Master of Divinity degree from Duke University, where he is a member of the Board of Visitors, and a bachelor’s degree in finance from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

Kim Hearn directs FTE Ministry Fellowship Programs, bringing extensive experience to the position after working with the Fund’s congregation-based programs. She joined FTE in 2006. Matthew Williams has been appointed Director of Doctoral Fellowship Programs. Williams most recently served as Associate Director for Fellowships, and has guided recruitment and leadership development opportunities for FTE Fellows since 2004.

More than 90 percent of students supported by FTE Ministry Fellowship Programs since 1998 now serve as pastors or leaders in church-related organizations; 79 percent of students in FTE Doctoral Fellowship Programs over the same time period are professors in the theological academy and 21 percent work as leaders in church or nonprofit settings.

The Fund for Theological Education is a national, ecumenical organization dedicated to supporting a new generation of talented, diverse Christian leaders who renew the church and change the world through vocations in pastoral ministry and theological education. Since 1954, FTE has awarded more than 6,000 fellowships.

To contribute to The Melissa Wiginton Ministry Fellowship Endowment Fund or The Sharon Watson Fluker Doctoral Fellowship Endowment Fund, visit www.fteleaders.org/wiginton or www.fteleaders.org/watsonfluker.

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