

REFLECTIONS
from the **2014**
**CHRISTIAN
LEADERSHIP
FORUM**

*Inspiring Leaders to
Shape the Future*



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“When the day of Pentecost had come,
they were all together in one place.”

ACTS 2:1



Stephen Lewis speaks during the closing worship.

Is it possible to design a space where diverse Christian leaders can imagine new ways to lead in a new era?

It was Pentecost weekend. We had gathered an amazing group of 175 faithful young adults and diverse leaders together in one place.

Seeking to spark inspiration and an intergenerational conversation, we were testing a new Christian Leadership Forum.

We designed the space. And the Spirit showed up.

We explored what can happen if we galvanize efforts to inspire emerging changemakers—young leaders who will shape the future of the church, the theological academy and communities around the world.

We designed faithful steps to notice, name and nurture future leaders. We also explored new ways these leaders are being called by God—as innovative preachers, entrepreneurial teachers, healing peacemakers and agents of social change.

Every generation must look to the next to preserve, renew, transform and lead Christian communities to do God's work in the world. For 60 years, the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE) has identified and supported diverse, faithful, wise and courageous young leaders for the church and academy. Our mission endures today because the witness and actions of God's church are vital to human flourishing.

The world has changed over the past six decades. The field of theological education and the different Christian communions of faith have changed, too.



We are leading organizations in a time of significant crisis. Young people who want to make a difference in the world don't know if the church and academy are places where they can lead. And the mentors who walk with them are navigating new social, political and economic realities.

Old ways and patterns of being church and pursuing education are ending. Something new is emerging. But disruption, while difficult, brings opportunities for innovation.

Early Christians understood this. During and after Pentecost, empowered by the Spirit, they tested new missional ideas of what it meant to be followers of Jesus. They cultivated the kind of leadership—the kind of discipleship—that would change the world.

Today, God continues to call us to inspire a new generation of leaders who will shape the future. Because they must learn to lead differently for a different world, we can no longer work in institutional silos and rest in what is familiar. Instead, we must work with new partners who push our thinking to discern where the Spirit is leading, so that a new generation of disciples can be inspired to meet humanity's most pressing needs.

New possibilities emerge when diverse members of the church gather together in one place. That is one of the lessons of Pentecost, and it was what we learned anew at the FTE Christian Leadership Forum.

Read here the stories, ideas and tweets of leaders who are called to partner with God to co-create the heaven we all long to see on earth. Be inspired and join them as they work to shape a vibrant church and a hopeful future.

Stephen Lewis
President, Forum for Theological Exploration



Participants discuss their leadership roles in the church and academy and where they are positioned in the church's living system.

Gathered Together: Mentors, Doers, Wild Thinkers and Leaders

BY DR. DORI BAKER

We imagined a space for creative cross-pollinations of the Spirit—a space where the church could see itself as a living whole and think together about what its leaders need.

At FTE's invitation, scholars, students, ministers and other leaders converged June 4-7, 2014 on the campus of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, IL, for our inaugural Christian Leadership Forum.

This overview covers who and how we gathered

and highlights four emerging themes. The full report, written by event participants, provides reflections from those who love the church as they explore together a vibrant future. An online companion provides more expansive explorations of ideas that surfaced. fteleaders.org/forum

Who and How We Gathered

Participants at FTE's Christian Leadership Forum reflected traditional denominations, emerging church networks and entrepreneurs who are creating new outposts for the work of God.

Gathering together for meals and plenaries, four cohort groups met separately to discover questions

and challenges they share within the church and the academy. These cohort groups included young adult leaders, denominational and emerging church partners, doctoral students of color and leaders in doctoral programs.

We carefully designed the Forum around the following simple principles:

- Incorporate fewer experts on stage and an invitation to surface the expertise that lives among us.
- Design with less insistence upon the tried-and-true and with more openness to new solutions.
- Provide an intentional invitation to show up, slow down, be present in the moment and improve the quality of engagement we have come to expect from large gatherings.
- Offer a learning event where people could hear one another's stories, find shared passions and self-organize around next steps toward cultivating leaders in their contexts.

“These times call for a community of trusted others.”

The first days of the gathering were spent in the four cohort groups. Each group focused on different aspects of exploring ministry and teaching, and on strategies for cultivating Christian leaders.

- Young adult leaders in ministry met together to hear from one another and to encounter pastors who are innovating new vocational paths.
- Doctoral students of color gathered to support one another's callings to scholarship—a calling that is at once academically rigorous, community-minded and culturally significant.
- Seminary professors, deans and presidents engaged in conversation around the transformations needed in order for doctoral education to

fulfill its mandate to serve a changing landscape.

- Partners in denominations and emerging church networks thought together about the particular



Dr. Dori Baker reflects together with participants on emerging themes and insights during the Christian Leadership Forum.

ways church must change if it is to capture the minds and hearts of young changemakers.

The last day-and-a-half brought everyone together for a conversation at the multiple intersections of Christian community—a conversation we believe is rare in our fractured, high-speed, specialized world.

After worshipping through liturgical dance, prayer stations and song, we spent a morning thinking together about the church as a living and dying system. We pondered how some leaders provide hospice to dying institutions, while others steward resources through transition, and still others give energy to new networks springing up to meet on-the-ground needs as they emerge.

We realized the need for bridge-builders who accompany folks from the tried-and-true into new ways of being. At all points of living, dying and living again, the church needs leaders attuned to particular context pulse points.

Four Emerging Themes

As we listened to what bubbled up across the different cohorts, we heard common urgencies.

→ BE A MENTOR: FIND A MENTOR

People of all ages who are leading life-giving ministries can offer wisdom to younger, emerging leaders. One doctoral student told her colleagues, “Create space in your office, your heart and your schedule to be a mentor of a different sort. People need mentors who look like them.” In addition, we heard young adults give thanks for mentors—those they sought and those who sought them. Many recognized the need to pay it forward by mentoring in turn.

→ CULTIVATE HABITS OF SELF-CARE AND QUIET PRACTICES OF PRAYER

Pastors and scholars alike named the need for daily practices that sharpen attentiveness to the movements of the Spirit. Especially in times of rapid change, staying connected to the Holy and consulting one’s sources of wisdom is as important as gaining proficiency in one’s profession or academic discipline.



Emily McGinley @thepemily

We’re not here just to have really good conversations; we’re here to see and act on a future for the #church #FTE-forum #fte60 #youngadults

→ LET THERE BE ROOM TO FAIL

Overwhelmingly, we heard that leaders learn from trying and failing. People need spaces to be vulnerable, to share doubts about their call, and to hear multiple stories of others who have failed on the way to creating a meaningful ministry and life. Because new forms of church require leaders

to take unprecedented risks, these times call for a community of trusted others with whom to discern and exchange mutual support.

“Finding others engaged in similar struggles seems to be life changing.”

→ I AM NOT ALONE: YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Agents of change can feel separated from others for multiple reasons—the counter-cultural strangeness of a prophetic voice; feeling too young or too old; denominational divides; and a variety of other cultural barriers. A young adult shared, “It was so helpful to talk with people my own age to eliminate feelings of isolation and frustration.” Another said, “Being in an ecumenical space gave me a sense of overall trends in the church. A paradigm shift is happening that is not only in my head!”

Finding others engaged in similar struggles seems to be life changing. “I am not alone in my wild ideas,” said one participant. “I have found other wild thinkers and doers to curate my wildness—my holy wildness.”

In the following pages, participants from the FTE Christian Leadership Forum share insights into what emerged within each cohort. These insights reflect a glimpse into the minds of the leaders present as we explored how to shape the future of the church and the academy together.

Dr. Dori Baker is research fellow at the Forum for Theological Exploration. She also serves as chaplain and director of student spiritual life at Sweet Briar College.

Cassidhe Hart explores the life-giving practice of tending to God's presence—by pausing, “showing up,” listening carefully and being open to the movement of the Spirit in every circumstance. She identifies a path toward cultivating and nurturing open minds, hearts and wills.

Attentiveness and Practices in Christian Ministry

BY CASSIDHE HART

It was a rare and beautiful moment. More than 175 leaders of all ages—from churches, seminaries, and community organizations—stood quietly, breaking up the energetic conversation and brainstorming that marked the day. We waited at our empty dinner tables with our hands on our stomachs, breathing deeply and consciously, and attending to the presence of God. In our breath I realized how infrequently we pause in the midst of our regular lives, much less during the full schedule of a conference, to ground ourselves in the present moment and in our nearness to our Sustainer. My mind was filled with the issues articulated by fellow young adults attending FTE's Christian Leadership Forum: the desire for spaces of openness, the call to listen to all ages whole-heartedly and the fear of failure that keeps us from being vulnerable and innovative.

“Be present. Listen attentively. Be open to new possibilities.”

Earlier that day, FTE's Chris McCain made three requests. Be present. Listen attentively. Be open

to new possibilities. Later, visionary Elaine Heath spoke about cultivating a loving, prophetic voice. She talked about growing a contemplative stance



Cassidhe Hart participates in worship during the opening dinner.

in the world and named the necessary parts of that stance: 1) showing up to myself, God, and others; 2) paying attention; 3) cooperating with God's already present work; and 4) releasing the outcome.

I noticed the similar themes in these talks—themes that address young leaders' dreams and longings. Show up. Be fully present. Listen carefully. Be open to God's unpredictable presence and unexpected outcomes. In short, continually hold this question: where are you giving your attention?

The work of prophetic leadership begins with carefully attending the Spirit's movement—in our life circumstances, in our fellow Way-walkers and in our own spirits. We must bring our whole selves to the process of leadership—our unlikely dreams, our vulnerabilities, our fear of messing up—and name the parts of ourselves we would rather keep hidden. Only then do we create the sacred, prophetic space where everyone is welcome. We must hear the voice of God in those around us. To listen to someone fully is to recognize and receive the image of God in that person. We must examine and offer up our preconceived images of what being the Body of Christ looks like. If our deepest-held convictions aren't being challenged, then we may not be truly following Jesus.



Karen Oliveto @RevKarenOliveto

Faithful living requires risk-taking and a willingness to embrace failure. Our renewal as a church is born out of our failure. #FTEforum

The Forum provided space for us to refocus our attention. Our task now, as we discern how to carry the work forward, is to further cultivate prophetic attention. None of the practices named

above will happen quickly or automatically. They require dedicated self-discipline. As young adult leaders, we are often surrounded by talk of skill

“How can we nurture the practices that help a leader to show up, listen well and open up to the ever-present God of the unexpected?”

development, resources and assets, networking and bridge building. These are all necessary. But the Forum revealed to me a need for daily practices that deepen and sharpen our attentiveness to the movement of the Holy Spirit—practices that lengthen our breath and ground us in the moment. How can we nurture the practices that help a leader to show up, listen well and open up to the ever-present God of the unexpected?

Cassidhe Hart is a second-year student at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. She is pursuing ordination as a deacon in the United Methodist Church.

Trevor Persaud reflects on the ways that Christian community can help young adults discern an integrated identity amid the sometimes exhausting array of divergent selves that vie within. Being with others who ask similar questions about one's gifts, one's identity, and one's purpose provided space for Trevor to find an interlude of harmony with lasting reverberations.

Conducting My Beautiful, Cacophonous Clone Choir

BY TREVOR PERSAUD

One of my summer TV obsessions is BBC America's *Orphan Black*. With the help of greenscreen effects, a talented actress portrays multiple people cloned from the



Trevor Persaud (pictured left) gathers with participants in the young adult cohort and small group leader, Eric Brown, (pictured second from right) who works with the Children's Defense Fund.

same genome. In a single episode she can be a scientist, a thief, a soccer mom, a crooked biotech executive, a fanatic cultist and whatever else the writers toss her way. It's an intriguing exploration of identity and of the pathways open to each individual.

I thought of *Orphan Black* when I contemplated

something I heard from another attendee at the FTE Christian Leadership Forum. She told us she wants to be, in her words, "fully myself." Like many of us, she loves her time with religious communities. But she also ventures beyond those communities for other social contexts where she unleashes her natural tendency to "cuss like a sailor." She wants a place for her divergent selves to exist as a comfortable whole.

I think this sentiment resonates with many young adults. If you open me up, you'll find a lot of different Trevors inside, all trying to outshout one another. Some of them (the ones that harbor grudges, or want things I shouldn't have, or convince me that I don't deserve the true birthright of God's children) are false Trevors, and they must die.

But others are facets of the jewel that God is carving out of the rough stone he pulled out of the dirt: the Star Trek nerd, the churchgoer, the writer, the office worker, the friend, the evangelical Protestant,

“I realized that the Kingdom of God is the one context in which human beings can live in full harmony.”

the mainline Protestant, the conservative(ish) theologian, the believer in LGBT rights. Switching between these roles can be exhausting. And I'm not a TV character. I can't use greenscreen to pretend I'm multiple people.

“The Kingdom of God will destroy the incomplete harmonies we create for ourselves.”

As I listened to the brilliant and talented people whom FTE had brought together, I realized that the Kingdom of God is the one context in which human beings can live in full harmony—not just with one another, but also within themselves. The church exists to realize that Kingdom on earth.

The Kingdom of God will destroy the incomplete harmonies we create for ourselves. If we declare that a Christian looks, acts, or thinks in certain ways that have no place in the fundamental genome of a sibling of Christ, we may create in them a pleasant

surface image, but we'll throw some believers into internal disarray. I've met many Christians, especially young adults, especially at FTE conferences, who broke these cultural molds, or were broken by them. I've also seen the remarkable possibilities that arise when the Spirit does the molding for us.

For me, Revelation 7:9—in which every tribe, tongue, people and nation sing together before the throne of God—is a perfect vision of what the Kingdom should be. It's also a great image of what I dream of for my own soul, from today to eternity: that every voice in my cacophonous internal choir could grow into harmony—into music no one has ever heard before, and which will never, ever cease.



FTE @fteleaders

We learn through conversations & experiences. How and what we learn is enhanced by the diverse perspectives we encounter. #FTEforum

Trevor Persaud is a writer, editor and communications professional focusing on nonprofit work.

The Rev. Shonda Nicole Gladden articulates the ongoing challenges women face in navigating a call to the pastorate. She names three specific ways for allies to support young women called to ministry.

Heroism in Menistry: Navigating Christian Leadership as a Young(er) Woman

BY REV. SHONDA NICOLE GLADDEN

Modern ministry contexts, particularly of historically Black houses of worship, often expect the office of pastor to be occupied by an older, married male. Any deviation from this phenotype can result in a crisis of confidence.

As a younger, unmarried, mothering woman in ministry, I find some people are unable to accept that I am *the* pastor. I don't mean this in the sense of entitlement, as if being pastor is something to be held in high regard over the people. But when someone introduces me as "the pastor," many people express a look of incredulity and discomfort. Others seem to be looking behind me for the

“The church is still at times beholden to patriarchy in ways that invalidate women’s leadership.”

person being referenced, as I surely cannot be *the* one. It is as if their theological core is completely displaced when confronted with a woman-as-pastor, almost irreconcilably so.

In light of this, I must do significant work to sustain

the calling on my life. At FTE's Christian Leadership Forum, I listened to the challenges expressed by young adults. I listened to the young women in ministry who share my struggles. They strive to



Rev. Shonda Nicole Gladden reports the challenges and experiences in ministry shared by participants in the young adult cohort.

navigate the spaces to which they are called, yet they are only marginally welcomed. It isn't easy to be young, female and called in the 21st century. So how can we all work together, in life-giving ways, to pursue Christian ministry and God's call?

The church is still at times beholden to patriarchy in ways that invalidate women's leadership. Women at the FTE Forum articulated a perceived necessity to equip themselves beyond what qualifies as sufficiency for men. In addition to their mastery

of ministry content areas, women seek tools to combat unspoken social expectations and micro-aggressions that result when they do not fit a prescribed mold.

Women still have to attend to how to *look* the part, and what it means to submit or be *covered* by male-dominated authority. They wrestle with pressures to conform by staying *in a woman's place*, which is typically with the children and youth, or in specialized women's ministries. My colleagues and I do not intend to denigrate these traditionally female ministry models—different people are called to spaces where their gifts and graces shine brightly. But we *do* object to the institutional propensity to relegate the young, female and called to specific areas of ministry *because* of their gender, regardless of whether or not they are called or competent to serve in those areas.

I heard countless tales of young women who expressed a call to the pastorate to their male ministry leadership—only to be denied opportunities to discern the viability of that call because “women can't be called to pastor.” Others acquired more education and demonstrated greater skill than their male counterparts, but were assigned ministry roles with little growth potential, insufficient compensation and meager leadership development opportunities.

Despite the obstacles, these young women express an unrelenting hope for their futures in Christian ministry. Where doors seem nailed shut, these bold leaders envision creating and opening new doors. They imagine opportunities beyond existing structures so that the work of the Almighty might be realized.

Are you are a person of influence within some sphere of Christian leadership? Do you wonder, “What can I do?” Here are some suggestions:

1) Be supportive of young women in ministry.

Provide safe spaces of counsel, but also give them the resources to navigate their call. We need people to hear us wholly and completely; we also need tangible support.



Tuhina Verma Rasche @tvtarasche

Diversity helps us to imagine new ideas, weaving different experiences together. #FTEforum

2) **Be transparent with us.** Tell us what steps you took to reach your place on the journey of Christian leadership and ministry. We need to see how failures intersect the pathway to success.

3) **Be sensitive and attentive to gender-derived inequities.** When you see women being treated differently and unfairly, say something. We need people whose voices are already valued in the spaces to which we seek access to speak up so that we can speak for ourselves.

Sadly, my love affair with celebrating the “she” in me and in others encounters serious quandaries within my ecclesial profession. My hope is that church folk might become less peculiar when it comes to the permissible places women may traverse. May all of our deviations from normative life narratives—in leadership, parenting, marriage and other areas—someday be seen—not as muddying the waters, but as more perfectly reflecting the beauty and diversity of our Creator.

The Rev. Shonda Nicole Gladden is a scholar and the pastor of Allen Temple African Methodist Episcopal Church in Marion, IN (www.shondagladden.com)

Editor's note: You can find what young adults had to say at the FTE Christian Leadership Forum at <http://bit.ly/1wWP6h2>

Ada Renée Williams reflects on her aspiration to transform society and advance social justice as an educator and leader.

At the Intersection of Education and Ministry

BY ADA RENÉE WILLIAMS

I am a doctoral student because I am informed by academic knowledge and lived experience that I seek to share beyond myself to diverse communities.



Ada Renée Williams speaks with another participant during the opening dinner.

To be clear, I am highly motivated to transform society by raising critical awareness of injustice, social inequality and the lack of genuine support and care for all communities.

At my core, I am an educator who informs through an integration of literary, cultural, and religious texts and contexts. This means engaging a way of teaching that is theoretically dynamic, yet grounded in a

practical application that emphasizes the relationship between education and ministry.

That deep connection between education and ministry resonated for me at the intersections created at the FTE Summit for Future Theological Educators and Christian Leadership Forum—though at times I felt I had to actively present my ministerial resume to be heard outside of the context of my doctoral peers.

At times I felt, as a scholar, that it was assumed my thoughts and comments about the praxis of ministry were less sincere, or too distant. But the theological mapping remains in my mind and I find myself referring to the intersections I experienced.

“In this space, I recognized my need for doctoral peers and guides who are with me for the long haul.”

In this space, I recognized my need for doctoral peers and guides who are with me for the long haul. These are the ones who are willing to toss me a life jacket and to soothe my wounds when I need

it. They are my biggest critics and supporters—a support team I can trust and with whom I can be unquestionably honest. My greatest needs on this

“I believe that the more resources I am given—through education and spiritual formation—the greater platform and possibilities I will have to make an impact for the Gospel’s sake.”

doctoral journey are money, models and (F)emtors (female mentors)!

In our gatherings we reflected in part on how we might help shape the future through our work in the academy and church. In many ways, I believe I



Neichelle G. Jones @nrgjones

Excited to be amongst friends and family at #FTEforum. These shared spaces are so life-giving. #FTE60



Cooper McCullough @coopmac

“How many resources are you spending on the institution of church, vs. how many resources are you spending on BEING church?” #FTEforum

am already shaping the future with my physical and online presence in the various social networks I am privileged to host and grow with.

However, I believe that the more resources I am given—through education and spiritual formation—the greater platform and possibilities I will have to make an impact for the Gospel’s sake.

This will result in a larger amount of liberation and freedom for myself and for those whom God calls me to serve. It is my hope that my communities of support and accountability will become equipped for the work of ministry, in accordance with Ephesians 4, which will—to use contemporary language with traditional theology—assist in God’s Holy Spirit continuing to go viral in every age.

Ada Renée Williams is a doctoral student in Interdisciplinary Studies at Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, and Itinerant Elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Christopher Carter highlights the importance of building community among scholars of color, and the imperative for the church to serve the needs of local communities.

Connecting with Community

BY CHRISTOPHER CARTER

Since my early teens, I have felt a strong call from God to serve others. In my mid-twenties my call to serve began to take on a clearer shape.

I view teaching, education and ministry through the prism of my call to serve the church. Each discipline represents a different color on the spectrum of my vocational calling. I never intended to pursue a Ph.D. In fact, my initial goal was to earn a Master of Divinity (M. Div.) degree and become a United Methodist pastor. However, during my M.Div. degree program—and while working as an assistant

“We need to stop focusing on sustaining ourselves and growing our congregations, and instead shift our focus to serving our communities.”

pastor at a local church—I realized that my vocational passion centered on teaching and preaching.

I feel a deep and burning need to help other clergy

learn how to address complex social and theological issues in a congregational setting. In this way, I hope to shape the future of ministry and church leadership by helping clergy and community leaders



Christopher Carter connects with Dr. Anne Joh, an associate professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.

take what they learn in the classroom and apply it to their communities in order to ignite social transformation.

This requires learning how to translate academic jargon to the “language of the people.” Because I am a first generation college student, my first language *is* “the language of the people!” It is how I think, speak and write. Despite what the academy may say, being able to speak to regular folk about my work is a gift, and I hope to use this gift to

move us toward a more just society.

At the FTE Summit for Future Theological Educators we were able to build community with other young scholars of color. Though I am fortunate to be close to a few other scholars of color at my school, there have been times when I've felt very much alone. For me, the most powerful observations at the Summit revolved around seeing the faculty and student interactions. There was a genuine interest among faculty to get to know the students, and I love this! It allowed us to feel heard—as if what we had to say and contribute to the discussion was really valuable.

Despite these moments I still feel like an outsider in academe. The language, rituals and culture seem foreign to me. It has been difficult to overcome the feeling that students who come from families where academic education was prioritized have an advantage within the academic world. If the culture of higher education is going to change, first generation scholars and scholars of color need to be visible, connected and included throughout the academy and represented in its leadership.



Brian Bantum @BrianBantum

Will theological education embrace the creativity necessary to be a space for the many, not the few? #FTEforum

Both the Summit and the FTE Christian Leadership Forum groups talked, in part, about Christian leadership in the 21st century—though, as doctoral students, we focused a lot on the practical realities of where we are in our degree programs, including writing the dissertation, developing a teaching philosophy, publishing and interviewing.

I particularly appreciated the conversations at

the Forum that allowed me to make connections between what I am researching and the greater church and community.

What stood out to me were the calls for churches to become more relevant to “young people.” I have only been a pastor for six years, so perhaps I am a bit naive, but I don't think this is the best approach. Rather, I think that our churches and our church leaders need to examine their communities—both their respective congregation and the community in which their congregation is located—and determine where the church's gifts and talents can meet the needs of the community, regardless of what age or demographic our justice work would appeal to.

I never asked my church members what they thought “we” should be doing. I asked them what they wanted to do, what they were passionate about! Passion sustains ministry.

If the Christian church needs to do anything differently in a changing world, it might be that we need to stop focusing on sustaining ourselves and growing our congregations, and instead shift our focus to serving our communities. Not because it will grow our respective congregations, but because it models the life of Jesus—a life we all aspire to reflect in some way.

A part of me thinks that too many American Christians believe that if the number of mainline and evangelical Christians continues to decline, then by proxy we are wrong to believe in the teachings of Jesus. Nothing can be further from the truth. Perhaps we need to embrace the plurality of beliefs of others in order to truly accept our own truth—the truth we find in the life and teachings of Jesus.

Christopher Carter is a doctoral student in Religion (Ethics and Society) at Claremont School of Theology. He served most recently as the senior pastor of First United Methodist Church of Compton, CA.

Dr. Gail O'Day voices a call to transform core patterns of doctoral education. O'Day points to innovations that invite community-engaged scholarship as essential to the future vitality of the church and academy.

All We Had To Do Was Look Around the Room: Why Innovation in Doctoral Education Matters

BY DR. GAIL R. O'DAY

FTE has a longstanding commitment to cultivate scholars of color. From this starting point, our cohort at the FTE Christian Leadership Forum quickly agreed that more is



Dr. Gail O'Day discusses doctoral education and cultivating scholars with institutional leaders and partners.

required than expanding who is being educated. Financial aid and mentoring for emerging scholars of color is a necessary first step. But doctoral education must also engage the diversity of cultural and social experiences among students. Inviting this wealth of experience into the construction of knowledge is essential to the future vitality of the academy.

Doctoral education is shaped by its commitments to knowledge acquisition and creation as universal truths. The result is that courses of study in many Ph.D. programs are not significantly different for today's students than they were for their teachers. The intellectual focus is on disciplinary continuity and learning the landscape of an academic field. Voices or perspectives that are perceived to be discontinuous with the primary disciplinary narrative (e.g., the perspectives of social communities and experiences other than the dominant educational cultural model) remain on the margins as specialized perspectives—points of view that do not impinge on or transform the core patterns of doctoral education and academic disciplines.

“Doctoral education must also engage the diversity of cultural and social experiences among students.”

Two of our cohort members, both scholars of color, shared stories about their doctoral education and early careers. They confirmed the impact of this pattern. Both are extraordinarily successful leaders and scholars. Yet their stories made clear their struggle to form a scholarly identity when the

educational goal is to enable the student to be a practitioner of the dominant knowledge ethos, regardless of the student's social context and perspective on how and why knowledge matters.

In contemplating change in doctoral education, we were all struck by the fact that we do a much better job in Master of Divinity (M.Div.) programs of valuing different experiences and of innovating and creating new educational patterns. Our M.Div. students are creative, energetic and restless with inherited patterns. They are shaped by traditional religious practices and committed to creating a more hope-filled and just church and world. M.Div. programs and students around the country are innovating with more explicit programs in community engagement, dual degrees, bi-vocational preparation, and arts and spirituality. This is a positive attempt to generate knowledge and develop educational patterns that advance institutional missions for this new day.



Shanell T Smith @shanellsmith

To teach is one thing. To mentor is another. Reaching back and bringing along the fold today. #FTEforum #Blessed! #LetsGetIt!

These creative and energetic M.Div. students are the pool from which doctoral education draws its future students.

One step forward is to bridge the “ethos gap” between master's programs and doctoral programs. What if doctoral programs revisited their core institutional and educational missions? What if they positioned the nurture of generative students as community-engaged scholars as their primary agenda, rather than the continuation of established academic disciplines?

Today's students come to doctoral education with deep experiences of community, of pedagogy, and of how knowledge is acquired, created and transmitted. What would a doctoral program look like that located individual learning in a broader communal understanding of scholarship, rather than privileging individual scholarly learning and accomplishment?

Such a doctoral program would be actively engaged in creating a new knowledge base. It would start with the contributions of distinct social experiences to the creation of knowledge, rather than assuming the dominant place of the universal in knowledge and experience. And from that new starting point, curricula and pedagogy would be transformed accordingly.

Such innovation goes against much of what gives doctoral education its status and identity. And yet as leaders of schools that educate doctoral students and that hire these new scholars on our faculties, we left the FTE Christian Leadership Forum convinced that it is our responsibility to help create this change. To be reminded that our conversations are not about abstract or generalized possibilities for future trends in doctoral education, all we had to do was look around the room at the other attendees. Our conversations were clearly about the young women and men who were with us in that place.

We must focus on how best to create and lead institutions that enable rising scholars of color to fulfill their visions for the church's future. We must strive to create doctoral education programs that honor and engage their diversity and creativity, sustain their transformative vision and position them as faculty members who will one day nurture the generative visions and energy of their students.

Dr. O'Day is dean and professor of New Testament and Preaching at Wake Forest University School of Divinity.

Karla Van Zee addresses what is needed to cultivate the next generation of leaders of the church and the world. She reflects the urgency of change and transformation to sustain and revitalize thriving Christian communities.

Can We? Leaders Learning Together

BY KARLA VAN ZEE

Can we, the church, *really* think outside the box?

Can we become an open and welcoming presence for all? Can we relinquish resources to others? Can we be honest about how power works? Can we foster the growth of a new generation of ministers?

Can we encourage these new ministers without foisting all of the hard work of change onto their shoulders? In short, can we muster enough will-power to effect massive transformation?

These questions surfaced at the FTE Christian Leadership Forum among 35 FTE partners, pastors and religious leaders. They represented established denominations and emerging church networks. We gathered to broaden one another's imaginations about cultivating young leaders for the church and the world. I was with these partners at the Forum as a listener. What I heard resoundingly—but, not surprisingly—was an urgent hunger for change.

A number of ideas surfaced about particular ways the church needs to change if it is to effectively cultivate young leaders. I heard folks say that the church is in a current state of needing many kinds of *more*: more hospitality, more flexibility, more justice, more prophetic proclamation, more freedom, grace, honesty, truth, vulnerability, diversity, heart

and boldness—even more anger.

FTE Board member Lee Hinson-Hasty said that the church needs a willingness to die to old ways of being so that a new church—a transformed



Karla Van Zee participates in the church partners cohort to discuss what is needed today to develop a diverse generation of Christian leaders.

church—may live. This theme re-emerged when young leaders, scholars, academics and social entrepreneurs joined the cohort of church leaders. Together, we imagined the church as a living and dying system. In this exercise, we “saw” one another in our different spaces of church and work. Some of us provide hospice to dying institutions, while others are giving life to innovative forms of ministry, or are stewarding institutions that are transforming to meet new needs.

We talked about the need for change, but also about the fear that accompanies true transformation. Fear and change are interrelated. Over and over, I heard church leaders mustering strength to *fear-less*, while adopting ways of being *fearless*.

It was clear from many conversations that “church change” is occurring rapidly and in unexpected ways. This kind of rapid, unpredictable change requires vital networks like the ones FTE sustains.

“Can we muster enough willpower to effect massive transformation?”

It requires networks that allow connections to emerge and to cohere between denominations and emerging church partners, leaders and resources.

Church is at heart a network of relationships. So before even thinking about building or rebuilding “the church,” we must first address how to build and rebuild equal partnerships for the life-long sustainability of God’s community. I heard many comments directed towards peace and reconciliation strategies in order to handle conflict and to ensure justice at all levels. This includes how to reconcile the sexism, racism, ageism, and classist atrocities of the past that still linger.

Another theme I heard was the need to create a safe space to participate in truth telling and in the sharing of stories: stories of pain, failure and disappointment that model vulnerability and open the church up to reconciliation. Testimonies of struggle, grief, failure and the faith that it takes to see God’s grace are needed today more than ever before. Teaching and passing on faith practices are also

key. In order to become a church leader, one has to have faithful practice. Faithful practices cultivate faithful people. As Arrington Chambliss stated, “We need to focus on prophetic practices of deep learning, where we grapple with ego in order to herald in a community of action.”

We heard the need for more mentoring opportunities that help young people learn how to lead faithfully. Current church leaders must find a passion to pass on their knowledge and to share hard-won wisdom with a new generation.

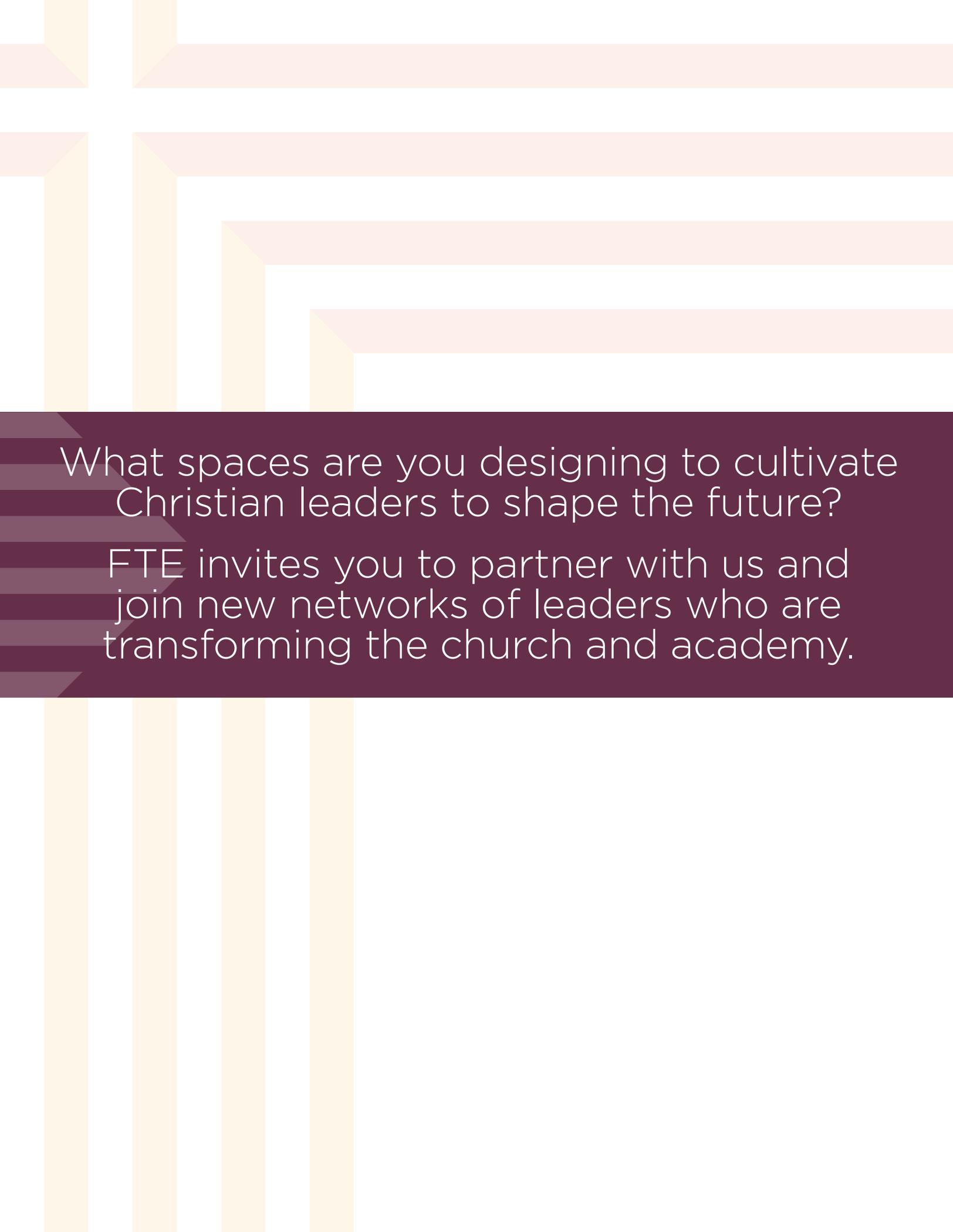
What if we gave young people opportunities to lead that cultivate strategies for dealing with inertia, bureaucracy and power structures—and funded these opportunities? What if churches gave young people space and property to experiment with communal and intentional living structures that emphasize the practice of hospitality?

What surprised me most at the Forum was how little I heard about money woes or funding needs. Everyone is feeling financial limits—but the conversation focused instead on looking toward an imagined future where the horizon holds a renewed church open to the new and different, rather than stymied by tradition and old habits.

The relationships formed through gatherings such as the FTE Christian Leadership Forum can help the church emerge into a new reality and a future that is transformative for all God’s people. Encouraging communities to join with FTE can lead to partnerships and concrete strategies that will sustain community and relationship-building practices.

We *can* fix these problems together!

Karla Van Zee is an FTE partner and experienced consultant with responsibility for managing and implementing Lilly Endowment’s coordination work with campus ministries and new pastors.



What spaces are you designing to cultivate
Christian leaders to shape the future?

FTE invites you to partner with us and
join new networks of leaders who are
transforming the church and academy.

*Inspiring Leaders to
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