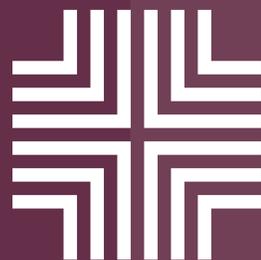


7 INSIGHTS
on **LEADERSHIP**
the **WORLD**
NEEDS NOW



Forum *for*
Theological
Exploration

Is it possible to design the future we will share?

We know that communities everywhere need inspired leaders to shape a hopeful future.

But can we actually *create* the conditions in which faithful, wise and courageous leaders will thrive?

We believe the answer is “yes.” And doing God’s work in the world depends on it.

Challenges abound today for faith-filled young people. The social, economic and spiritual landscape they navigate is in constant flux. For the people and organizations that accompany young people on their journeys, the ground is shifting beneath their feet, too.

Something new is happening.

That’s why we listened deeply to our stakeholders as we approached the milestone of our 60th anniversary. The Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE) reached out to talk with diverse partners who engage the challenges that young leaders face.

Over 18 months in seven cities with 200 conversation partners, FTE explored three questions:

- **What are the leadership questions you wrestle with in your context?**
- **What kinds of leaders does the world need from the church today?**
- **What attributes must these leaders have to make a difference in the world?**



Insights came from many viewpoints: community leaders; seminary presidents and deans; denominational, evangelical and emergent church ministers and administrators; nonprofit executives; scholars, students, sociologists and social justice advocates.

Their insights impact how FTE has designed and continues to create new strategies to cultivate future leaders. Because informed awareness must lead to action.

One conversation partner told me, “I hope you will actually do something with this information. Some conversations matter, and some conversations simply disappear.”

These conversations matter. They may be disruptive to the way things are done—but they will not disappear.



We are grateful to everyone who shared these insights. Now, leaving room for God’s Spirit to guide us, it is time to design new ecosystems that cultivate and “grow” young Christian leaders who serve the common good.

This design process is not complete without you. Connect with us. Bring your insights. Design the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Lewis". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Stephen Lewis

President, Forum for Theological Exploration

TURNING CHALLENGE INTO CHANGE





INSIGHT 1

Imagination and an innovative spirit top the attributes needed in a new generation of Christian leaders who work for the good of the world. The challenges that faithful young people confront today are different than the challenges of yesterday. So their leadership style must be different, too. To be effective, they need adaptive leadership skills. In the churn of constant

“Our world needs courageous leaders who are not afraid to be entrepreneurial.”

NONPROFIT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

change, those who aspire to lead must be resilient risk-takers and spiritual social entrepreneurs—able to embrace ambiguity, rebound from failures and think creatively.

The era of “Lone Ranger” leadership is over. Instead, collaboration is key. To build authentic and sustainable communities, young leaders must build new bridges across old boundaries—mobilizing people to do together what they cannot do alone. Colleges, theological schools, congregations and leadership incubators such as FTE must

prepare young leaders to be coalition builders between multiple cultures. The social landscape calls for “poly-lingual” interpreters with the capacity to engage diverse groups and issues. To be agents of change—working through the church and the academy—their approach to leadership must have deep roots firmly planted in the love of God and love of neighbor.





INSIGHT 2

New models and settings for ministry spark the imagination of young leaders. Yes, they want to serve “the church.” But to young leaders, most often that means serving the church’s mission in the world around them. Emerging young leaders have strong commitments to God’s work beyond the church’s walls and buildings. In addition to equipping them to serve traditional congregations and to teach in academic settings, we must give them the skills they need to work at the growing edges of Christian ministry. These ministry settings include missional communities, nonprofits and human development initiatives, world relief organizations, advocacy groups and more.

Young people exploring ministry seek new ways to connect with the Gospel. The church building is not their destination, but rather the platform where they help launch God’s work in communities. That’s why the leadership training we offer must empower them to be trailblazers. On city streets and on the global stage, they will expand the definition of ministry in many different contexts.

“Leaders are leaning forward into new ways of being and doing ministry.”

ASSOCIATE PASTOR





INSIGHT 3

Serving others through a commitment to social justice is a major magnet for youth who are drawn to vocations in ministry and teaching. Across North America, young leaders articulate their ministry interests as “discipleship.” Ministry is the way they follow Jesus Christ—not their commitment to membership in the institutional church. Denominational divides seem to melt away

wherever young adults find compelling opportunities to make a difference in the world through the church.

“The church must not be so bound by its buildings, but by social relevance to the broader public sphere.”

MINISTER AND PROFESSOR

So where will we find the future leaders of faith communities—especially as traditional social structures morph and take different shapes? We will find them engaged in the issues of the day: eradicating poverty, alleviating hunger and homelessness, improving education and health care, and reviving economically depressed neighborhoods, where they serve as the hands of Christ in the world.





INSIGHT 4

Profound cultural shifts challenge theological education to be accessible and relevant today. Seminary presidents, deans, faculty and staff express anxiety as they “prepare for the unknown.” They’re concerned about making the case for a theological education—and the substantial financial investment it requires—in an increasingly secular world. They are also aware that many young people don’t see either the church or the theological academy as relevant and robust places to be. At some theological schools, institutional survival feels at-risk.

The good news is that educators clearly see the paradigm shift in the attributes needed for high-impact Christian leadership. That shift brings the opportunity to make corresponding changes in how future leaders are educated and prepared. Theological schools can create dynamic new models for leadership training and teaching—models that are relevant, timely and in tune with the young people and communities they serve.

“If having enough money for seminary is part of the process, we aren’t going to see more diversity in leadership.”

MINISTRY RESIDENT





INSIGHT 5

It's time to reevaluate and transform theological education. Our conversation partners worry that access to theological education as we know it is out of reach for students from diverse backgrounds. Young adults discerning a call to ministry in varied cultural contexts often lack the money and time for traditional, full-time study as they fulfill other life responsibilities.

“The academy does not represent the diverse realities which congregations serve.”

UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

Does the path to ministry still hinge on the Master of Divinity degree—the “gold standard” of the past? Should students think bi-vocationally? Do courses adequately prepare students for leadership when they graduate? What strategies sustain doctoral students of color who pursue the vocation of teaching? Finding answers to these questions can mitigate the risk of theological education becoming irrelevant.

Lack of diversity is another danger for theological education. Student and faculty diversity has failed to keep pace with the growing diversity of North American communities. If theological schools are to effectively serve the faith communities at the heart of their missions, this diversity divide must be bridged.





INSIGHT 6

Redefine what “quality” means. The world has changed over the past 60 years. How we define quality leadership needs to change, too. Effective leaders aren’t necessarily high academic performers or award winners. Many are unlikely leaders if measured by old standards. But they are exactly what the world needs now. New metrics are unfolding.

Quality leaders are defined by sensitivity and relational skills. They embody mature spirituality, curiosity and imagination. They are able to interpret patterns, relationships, data and differences. They retain a countercultural commitment to the Christian church and to discerning God’s presence. These leaders are open to internal transformation—which enables them to create the spaces that transform others. The ethic of diversity is also essential. How do today’s leaders keep diverse groups of people at the same table, striving toward a common goal, so that those with extreme differences don’t walk away, but continue to work together? It’s time to make room for unlikely leaders who redefine quality leadership.

“We are struggling with how to define ‘quality’ in ways that fit the ever-increasing contexts for ministry.”

SEMINARY PROFESSOR





INSIGHT 7

Exposure to opportunities to “try on the mantle of ministry” changes lives. We can help young people imagine themselves in professional ministry or teaching by giving them temporary leadership roles, such as pastoral internships or apprenticeships. New models for lives of service are especially helpful to those who feel disillusioned with institutional church contexts. Other students may embrace traditional, congregation-based leadership roles. We must provide these opportunities as well.

“We need people who partner to set young people free to do marvelous things.”

SEMINARY DEAN

Wise mentors and friends are touchstones for discernment. Young leaders need communities of accountability to stay on track. That’s why new models for intergenerational mentoring and peer support networks are essential. By connecting established faith leaders with rising ones, we can foster leadership across the divides of experience, age, cultural origin, race, ideology and circles of influence.

What’s next? Take seven steps forward.

The conversation continues. So does action. What do these seven insights inspire you to do? **Share your ideas at fteleaders.org/sevensteps.** Together, let’s name seven steps to foster faithful leadership that the world needs now.



*Inspiring Leaders to
Shape the Future*



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