



FTE

THE FUND FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

**NEXTGENERATION
LEADERS**

Crossing Boundaries, Exploring a Call

“Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
‘Whom shall I send, and who shall go for us?’
And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’”

ISAIAH 6:8



Crossing Boundaries, Exploring a Call

PROFILES OF FTE MINISTRY FELLOWS

“With this book, we invite you to come and see what we at The Fund for Theological Education have had the privilege of witnessing for the past ten years: young adults seeking to live out the call of God in their lives.”

Come and see. This simple instruction—to move from our usual places with their prejudices and blind spots, to go and behold something new, something that may change our perspectives and our lives altogether—sounds again and again in the New Testament, like a chime of the hours reminding us what to do.

Come and see, Jesus invites those who ask where he lives. Come and see whether anything good can come out of Nazareth. Come and see a man who told me all I've ever done. Come and see where they laid him. With this book, we invite you to come and see what we at The Fund for Theological Education have had the privilege of witnessing for the past ten years: young adults seeking to live out the call of God in their lives.

Nearly 1,000 gifted people exploring ministry and between the ages of 20 and 35—most under 30—have come into our view as FTE Fellows since 1998. To see them is to first acknowledge that they are not all alike. They are diverse in gender, race, economic status, church tradition, education, experience, political position, sexual orientation, and expectations. But also, looking carefully at their lives over the course of the last decade, we recognize certain common traits and themes that both shape and express who they are becoming.

They are remarkable in their true love for the Gospel. Contrary to the popular narrative about their generation, they are spiritual and religious. They understand that the Gospel requires a community for remembering whose they are and who they are to be. Many struggle with feelings of alienation from the church they see—from its divisive arguments, its seeming intransigence, its near-timidity—and sometimes they wonder where they belong. But the church is where they have cast their lot.

We see this love for the Gospel in their heartfelt and enacted desire for God's healing and reconciliation to be made manifest; that is, in their commitment to social justice. These young adults come to the longing for justice in and through honest and deep engagement with the world beyond their own positions of privilege. They cross boundaries of geography, language, custom and class to participate in the lives of the people in places where they believe Jesus would be. Unlike any previous cohort of Americans, they carry an internal global-consciousness. They move and behold, placing themselves where they might glimpse the world through God's eyes.

Finally, for themselves, we see the dream of living a life which integrates their own gifts and wounds, their deep questions, and their passion for the Gospel in response to the brokenness of the world and the glory of its beauty. They hold a belief in themselves as agents for change and a dawning recognition of the duties of leadership. They are made restless by their own perceived capacities to do something new, capacities fueled and fed by their faith.

The stories of our 2007-08 Ministry Fellows are representative of the callings and faithful journeys of the hundreds with whom we have been privileged to companion in vocational exploration.

So, with us, come and behold these young leaders God is calling to life in our midst. They beckon us in fresh ways—standing as heirs of those who have come before, as sons and daughters of those who have been called to lead God's people—to come and see the goodness of the Lord and to join with God's work in behalf of all creation.

Melissa Wiginton

Vice President
Ministry Programs and Planning
The Fund for Theological Education

Chandra Payne Allen



Thousands of miles from home, Chandra Allen decided to do something completely out of character. Then a Davidson College student on an exchange year in Germany, Allen started attending a “very different kind of church than what I’d grown up with. Everyone participated. It wasn’t so structured and leadership opportunities weren’t based on gender. I began to think that I could see myself spending more time in a setting like this.”

Allen had grown up in Nashville, the daughter of Missionary Baptists in what she calls a “conservative Southern church. . .where the attitude was, if you did certain things, you were a Christian—if not, you were off the list! At the time, I didn’t feel much of a personal relationship with God or with the church.”

But others clearly saw gifts for ministry in her. At Davidson, Allen was invited to participate in one

Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church

of the Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation (PTEV), a national initiative supported by Lilly Endowment Inc. “I looked at the program and at first said ‘no way,’” remembers Allen, who had plans to become a teacher. But she later felt an urge to apply. During her interview for a place in the program, Allen says she came to realize “I never thought I would be in ministry, but it seemed like something incredible to explore. I’ve only known one definition of ministry, and I wanted to know about other paths.”

After finishing her undergraduate studies, Allen took advantage of the program’s opportunities to do a congregational internship, during which she worked with a female pastor.

“In my denomination at the time, women couldn’t be pastors. So getting to know her and getting to experience church as a self-selected, life-giving community with an open environment made being in church very comfortable!” Allen then expanded her comfort zone by spending two years in intentional communities set in economically depressed urban areas, places where, she says, “ministry really connected with me.”

Today, Allen finds herself drawn to empowering people in congregations through Christian education. She plans to spend next summer exploring models of Christian education in diverse communities of faith across the United States while she remains grounded in her own Christian Methodist Episcopal church. Her dream is to invigorate the curriculum

and pedagogy of the tradition with best practices from a variety of congregations.

Her FTE experience helped Allen focus on the questions important for her own empowerment as a leader in the church.

“I worked with other FTE Fellows on a ‘clarity committee.’ I was the focus person and told my story to the group. It’s a three-hour process; other people ask questions and draw things out of you. It helped me figure out questions related to being ordained and what that looks like in different denominations.”

Now, Allen says, “My vision of the church is for it to be recognized as a place of help, welcome and refuge in the community. An ideal church would successfully and intentionally provide people with the opportunity to be informed about their faith and would help them identify useful tools to express that faith through action in the world. An ideal church would be one in which people felt comfortable questioning and exploring different approaches to worship, community action, and other ways of responding to God. I think that’s where I belong.”

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Chicago Theological Seminary, United Church of Christ

Growing up with an attorney and community activist father and an acclaimed scholar as a mother, Nathan Dannison followed his interests and family tradition when he chose his course of study at Western Michigan University—pre-law, comparative religion and ethics.

“When I graduated, I viewed the world with a different lens than my peers, but ministry was never a consideration. I wanted to have a positive effect on the world, but I was also ready to get married, so I decided to put off grad school. I wanted a sense of security.” Dannison settled into marriage and started selling radio advertising. He quickly discovered that he was “pretty good at it...and I looked successful to the outside world. But I hated every second of it.”

Nine months later, the security he had worked so hard to construct was violently disrupted. His father, “a wise, progressive individual,” died suddenly. “I lost my mooring when I lost him,” says Dannison. He also began to feel that his marriage “had unraveled.” He took a week off from work “to regroup,” and visited a good friend. “We sat around and talked about my Dad. I felt so grateful to have a friend just be with me.”

Dannison called the next day only to find that his friend had taken his own life. On the way to visit his friend’s brothers, a shaken Dannison crashed his car into a concrete pylon, awakening to police search lights. “I felt so alone, exposed... like I had done things the ‘right way’, building this secure life, and now everything was gone—

my father, my wife, my friend, everything.”

That’s when Dannison had a dream. “I had this vision that I’d been building a boat to sail many people to a city. But the river had flooded its banks and destroyed the boat. There was nothing there. Then, I felt a warm presence...it was God reassuring me that my boat was already where it needed to be. I just needed to get in the water and the current would take me where I needed to go.”

Dannison returned to the church of his childhood in Grand Rapids, Michigan. “I hadn’t been in a long time, and they had a new minister. He wanted me to work as director of outreach, and told me that I should apply to seminary.” Without hesitation, while still working at the church, he applied and began studies at Chicago Theological Seminary.

Today, Dannison sees his future including “some mission work, but also involvement in a local church. I’d like to find a way to connect more churches to places where the ‘least among us’ live.” For his FTE Ministry Project, Dannison will travel to Palestine to build a playground in Bethlehem and to “seek help for the lives of children in the occupied territories. If I can help one from falling into violence, that’s worth living for.”

Attending the Fund’s Ministry Conference, says Dannison, “was like being invited to a meeting of my heroes! FTE Fellows seem driven not because they want to succeed on the world’s terms but because they want to see the world healed.”



Along his path of self-discovery, Dannison has added a new interest: blacksmithing. “I tried woodworking before and I was miserable at it. You make a mistake in wood and you need to scrap everything. With iron, you can put it back in the forge and start over. By making something with your hands, you reconnect with how God created us to be creators ourselves. I’m ready for that now.”

Laura Fanucci



A conversation Laura Fanucci had during her senior year at the University of Notre Dame turned her life in a definite direction—although it was the opposite of what her professor intended.

“She was encouraging me to do graduate work in French,” remembers Fanucci, an academic achiever who’d grown up in an Irish Catholic family in a small town near Flint, Michigan. “I kept bringing up the idea that my faith somehow needed to be a bigger part of my life’s work. That’s when she told me, ‘You can learn to compartmentalize your life. I’m a Christian and I do that.’” Fanucci left the professor’s office thinking: “I can’t reconcile that with what I know. Doing ministry and being part of the church is what I have to do with my life. For me, this was the only answer. It’s the best thing I could do with my talents and gifts.”

St. John’s School of Theology • Seminary, Roman Catholic Church

That decision had been some time in the making. While at Notre Dame, Fanucci became involved with the school’s Center for Social Concerns, doing service projects and joining international immersion trips. After graduation, she devoted herself to social outreach work in France. “I wanted to take some time for discernment,” Fanucci remembers. “I went to France and worked at a home for the handicapped and at a homeless shelter.” The year was a “humbling experience” in which “the joy of living out my faith in concrete ways came up against the hard questions—such as how a loving God allows people with severe handicaps and children to suffer.” Fanucci says that her post-graduate year of service confirmed what she had felt at graduation. “What I wanted was a ‘do-over.’ I wanted to go back to school and major in theology!”

Today, as a student at St. John’s School of Theology•Seminary in Minnesota, that wish is a reality. Fanucci says she realizes that, as a Catholic, “traditional ordained ministry is not an option at this time.” But she has openly discussed with other FTE Fellows “what gives us hope... and one big thing is the people who stay in the system and try to change it. I grew up with this church. I have explored other faiths, but this tradition is a real part of my identity, and there is so much work that I can do as a layperson. With fewer priests, laywomen have stepped up and filled many roles. I don’t see a lot of doors closed to me.”

Fanucci hopes to focus her FTE Ministry Project on young adults because “there’s a real need in my generation for spiritual growth. Many young people say, ‘I’m spiritual, but I’m not religious,’ because they don’t identify with institutional churches as a place that can give them life.”

As an FTE Fellow, Fanucci notes, it’s been “enormously helpful” to meet other young people who find life in church and who have truly found their vocation. “I love the idea that the way to find what to do with your life is to identify the place where your greatest passions meet the world’s greatest needs. Knowing that this is what I have to do with my life is not a burden; it’s a joy. I’m so thankful I discovered it.”



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Zac Willette



Zac Willette first got encouragement to pursue ministry close to home. Not only did he grow up two blocks from the church, his family “was open to creating whatever kind of family God invited them to create,” says Willette. “I grew up in a small Minnesota town with my own siblings, foster kids, cousins who went to high school with us, and refugees from Vietnam. Although there were never more than seven kids in the house at one time, it ended up being 23 kids total. I didn’t know that my parents were helping others, I just thought that’s what being a family meant. I grew up thinking anyone could be my brother or sister.”

At age 13, Willette and his parents had a talk with his pastor about becoming a priest. Although he had interest, Willette “dodged the question for a long time. It wasn’t until I was 26 or so that I got grown up about it.” A big part of that growing up occurred while traveling internationally,

Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Roman Catholic

visiting more than 40 states on road trips with his family. “Mom is a big believer in travel,” he says. “There may be other ways to learn what travel teaches you, but it’s the most fun.”

After graduating from Vanderbilt University with a degree in elementary education and a self-created service learning minor, Willette headed to a primary school on a large Arizona reservation. There he taught kindergarten and learned a fair amount of the native Tohono O’odham language. Teaching 24 full-day kindergartners wasn’t all he did. Willette worked to help found a new school, a college prep high school which opened a year later. “People thought we were crazy,” he remembers, “since there was a high school dropout rate of 50 percent. But parents and tribal leaders agreed to this big experiment.” The first of its kind in Arizona, the school integrates tribal language and history into the curriculum and is still going strong. Willette treasures that time when “so much came together for me—the love of teaching and learning, and a way to marry a passion for education with a passion for justice.”

For his FTE Ministry Project, Willette, an accomplished photographer and instructor, is planning to do a series of interviews and photographs, using questions that draw from the basic principles of spiritual direction, focusing on listening to the ways “God reveals Godself in big and little ways to each of us.” His wide-ranging choice of interviewees will take him on a cross-country train journey that will bring

him into conversations with strangers, friends and family whose stories and images Willette will record in a blog and perhaps incorporate within some other multi-media format.

He adds that the experience of being an FTE Fellow has been “remarkable—especially to be able to speak with all the different branches of the Christian family tree and to plan today how we might share each other’s pulpits tomorrow.”

When asked what his ministry might be, Willette answers, “God has invited me to a complete surprise, but the components of what I imagine God’s invitation to be have been there all along.”

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Duke Divinity School, United Methodist Church

For Elaine Wilder, the call to ministry came to her from many different directions and on many different occasions, including the car rides home from her babysitting jobs. “I babysat for our senior pastor, and we would talk about it while we were riding in the car,” Wilder remembers. “At church, people kept telling me that I should consider ministry...God definitely used the church to help me hear my calling!”

Even with that encouragement, Wilder didn’t seriously consider ministry until starting college at Furman University, where she majored in Spanish and Religion. “I had other plans, other interests. I always wanted to be a teacher... but I started to see I enjoyed ministry more, and that I’d still be able to teach as a pastor.” College also presented Wilder with the first “turmoil” she had ever experienced around pursuing the ministry as a woman: for the first time, she was told that maybe she’d heard the calling incorrectly. “But I had strong support at Furman as well—and that helped me be sure that ministry would be the best use of my gifts.”

After college, Wilder headed to Costa Rica, where she studied liberation theology at a small seminary as a Rotary Scholar. “The program was in Spanish, and it was great to be out of my comfort zone, to be the ‘stranger’ and to see how people there viewed my country and the world,” says Wilder, who had previously volunteered in a Honduran orphanage. “You see that many people find happiness in very different circumstances—applying different values—and that true

happiness is about who you’re with and what you’re doing; it’s about people, not possessions.”

Wilder sees herself as a minister in a local church, pursuing two strong areas of interest: making the church a “healthy place for faith development” and focusing on ministering to the Hispanic community.

“I think faith is often developed through a long period of questioning—yet I’ve found that, for many, church might not be the most nurturing place for that. I don’t think it’s so much about providing answers but instead walking together in the questions, letting each person grow through prayer and fellowship. Questioning doesn’t mean your faith is weak or that you’re doing anything wrong. I’d like to create the kind of environment where people are comfortable asking their questions.”

For her FTE Ministry Project, Wilder is considering a focus that will allow her to walk with people undergoing a particularly difficult time of questioning—exploring ministry in the context of hospice care and end-of-life issues. She also has interest in learning from Methodist pastors who have been through the denominational process of ordination to better understand the system.

Wilder says her FTE fellowship and the Fund’s programs are “like water for my journey... it’s inspiring to be with other people my age who are walking the same path.”



And, when her path takes her back to her home church in Roswell, Georgia, she finds that not much has changed. “They are still big supporters, givers of leadership. I’m excited about the opportunity to one day share and apply what I’ve learned one day as the leader of a community of faith...to give people the nurturing community they’re searching for.”

Elizabeth Griswold



Elizabeth Griswold certainly expected some challenges during the year she spent as a volunteer English teacher at a community school in Guatemala. But finding herself being totally responsible for the well-being of three frightened children in a developing country wasn't one of them.

"I was living with a host family and suddenly both parents left to immigrate to the U.S.," Griswold remembers. "When I came home one night, they had gone. They told their daughters that they would send money from America, but that I would be their mother. It was a shock. Every night, the girls and I would lie awake and pray together for God's help." Although the parents returned two months later after being arrested and deported, Griswold realized "that I can't get away from the sense that I've been privileged in this world. I've always had help and resources. But this family's situation was so harsh that the parents were desperate to provide for their daughters."

Harvard Divinity School, United Church of Christ

A San Diego native, Griswold had first been inspired by her church to find ways to serve others. "I enjoyed church as a child and had various roles...my church was involved in outreach to migrant farm workers and in an AIDS hospice. I got to see church as not just something to do on Sundays but as a framework for how to live my life." She didn't seriously start thinking about pursuing ministry until her senior year as a religion major at UCLA, but Griswold remembers her congregation "always encouraged me...not many young people were still involved in church by the time I was in college; I think the older generation saw something in me because I kept coming back!"

Upon graduation, Griswold decided to move from "studying religion from an academic perspective" to volunteering with a Catholic workers' community on Los Angeles' East Side. She was paid \$15 a week and worked full-time at a soup kitchen and at other social projects. "I felt Jesus' call to justice and to be part of works of mercy."

Griswold now hopes to serve as a parish minister: "What a privilege it would be to baptize children, to help lead marriage ceremonies and funerals—to really walk beside people through all the different stages of life." She hopes to work with a congregation similar to the one she grew up in where "I can do social justice advocacy and some international work."

Being an FTE Fellow has led Griswold to "totally reaffirm my commitment to ministry

in a congregation. And I'm looking forward to turning to other FTE Fellows as colleagues in the future." For her FTE Ministry Project, Griswold is considering a focus on nonviolent organizing in South Africa and its role in the defeat of apartheid. She is equally passionate about "South Africa's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic and what we in the U.S. could learn from that."

Her interest in fighting HIV and AIDS stems from a close encounter she had while working in a free dental clinic in East L.A. Griswold accidentally got pricked with a needle used on a patient who was an IV drug user. She had to take retroviral medicines and endure testing for six months. "Thank God it turned out that I don't have HIV, but it sure gave me heart for that issue."

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Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Ministry may seem to be somewhat of a ‘family business’ for Michael Powell. The son of a theologian, Powell has five pastors in the last two generations of his family tree. He has also learned his spiritual lessons in far-flung locales, ranging from a rubber farm in rural India to the competitive floors of gymnastic meets.

“I officially joined a team when I was 12, competed in high school, in college at William and Mary, and I’m now the assistant coach of a team,” says Powell, a USA Gymnastics Academic All-American. “I guess I just love the challenge of doing things that are supposed to be impossible—the hardest, most extreme route. Gymnastics seemed to fit!” says Powell, who also notes that the gym has taught him life lessons including “goal setting, leadership, time management and conquering fear—things I can definitely use in any form of ministry.”

Although Powell started thinking about the ministry from “around the first time I was allowed to sit in the pew up front,” his family “didn’t bring it up or put any pressure on me.” They did broaden his perspectives by taking the family along on his father’s pastoral sabbaticals, starting with a visit to Tanzania when Powell was in the sixth grade. Away from his Ohio hometown, he discovered “some of the realities of the world and the privilege that we have. The awareness fueled my addiction to travel...I’ve been to 28 countries now and I’m trying to keep that number ahead of my age!”

Powell has come to “feel called to some sort of mission work, either done internationally or within a parish ministry. I see myself as open to the needs of the church as a global church, yet I think the greatest need for mission is in the U.S. We say all the things that we believe and we sing lovely songs, but how does that translate into life, into action? We need to gain a great deal of perspective in our country about the mission of God and how seriously we take the realities of the world—the places where theology and practice meet.”

To get closer to those places, Powell is considering pursuing another degree, this time in poverty studies, and, for his FTE Ministry Project, is looking into traveling “around China, where evangelism is illegal and the church is underground...or perhaps Guatemala, where I know someone who played a role in quelling that country’s civil war. Someone like that could show me how he managed to live his faith through his social-political actions.”

For Powell, being an FTE Fellow has been a great chance “to make connections within the church world, which is a surprisingly small world.” A recent conversation with his college gymnastics coach, an avowed atheist, recently made the importance of that world even clearer. “I was talking to him after a bad day at seminary,” Powell remembers. “He looked at me and said, ‘the world cannot afford to lose the church. And vice-versa.’”



“That’s the heart of mission for me, being in the trenches and feeling that faith and Christianity are relevant to the world.”

Kara Reagan



Kara Reagan says her choice of friends raised some eyebrows at Colorado College, where she studied physics and history as an undergraduate.

Brought up as a Southern Baptist, Reagan had “gone Bible study shopping” and ended up in a diverse campus interfaith group. “I was hanging out with Air Force Academy Baptists and Catholic pacifists,” she says. “People started calling me the ‘Roamin’ Baptist!”

Straddling different perspectives has always been second nature for Reagan, who describes herself as “amphibious—always a bit between two worlds.” An active interest in science led her to take flight training and consider a career in U.S. space programs. But she also loved the humanities and felt pulled toward discussions about faith, starting in the sixth grade when she volunteered as a vacation Bible school leader. From her earliest beginnings, Reagan remembers being literally

Eden Theological Seminary, American Baptist Church

touched by her family’s faith. “I had a lot of health problems as a baby, including heart surgery when I was hours old,” she recalls. “My mom and grandma would sit with me at night. They would lightly touch my skin, reassure and comfort me, and tell me about Jesus. I remember they prayed for me constantly.”

Reagan was later inspired by a high school teacher who asked big open-ended questions like, “What exactly is the church?” At the same time, she discovered that her own love for “playing with the big ideas” was merging with an intense interest in service. “It wasn’t a divine whammy, but I made a long, gradual progression toward integrating my faith into my life after I graduated from college. Faith has always been part of my life’s interests but it’s now at the center of what I’m passionate about.”

Today as a second-year student at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Reagan works closely with youth groups and spent the past year as a hospital chaplain. She feels “as if I’m being led toward campus ministry, maybe even college chaplaincy,” and to other places where she can continue to explore life’s big questions with a group of faithful seekers. “My passion is to challenge others—both believer and non-believer—to consider Christ, the nature of the church and to find their role in it.” She hopes her seminary studies will provide “new tools to engage others on higher intellectual and spiritual levels.”

Her FTE fellowship further sparked that passion. “They put some big ideas on us at the Fund’s ministry conference,” Reagan recalls. “I loved being around bright, articulate people who are passionate about the life of the church.” For her FTE Ministry Project, Reagan will engage both the external and internal dimensions of preparing to be a leader for the life of the church. She will be trained in advocacy for social justice in the United States Congress and then spend several weeks in silence and reflection with a community of Carmelite women religious in the Colorado mountains.

Reagan thinks the seeds of this idea were planted during a mysticism class at Colorado College when she was assigned to “go into the Sand Dunes National Monument—after we’d been studying the desert ‘fathers and mothers.’ We started hiking. When I got to the top of the highest dune I came face-to-face with a 70-year-old German physicist from Los Alamos...someone quite different from me, but a wonderful point of connection. Yet again, two of my seemingly separate worlds had joined in perfect harmony!” laughs Reagan. “Maybe bridging people and ideas is what I’m born to do.”

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Church Divinity School of the Pacific, Episcopal Church

Justin Cannon remembers growing up in Detroit, where his parents joined other inner-city families as members of “a cooperative Christian community” connected to an Episcopal parish. His family eventually moved to another part of the state, but the community connection set a precedent for Cannon. “It was tightly knit, like one big family,” he remembers. “It offered something many people don’t find, something that I find myself gravitating toward now—a strong sense of community life.”

That impulse for community is something that has long resonated with Cannon, who says his “spiritual awakening” happened in the eighth grade. “We’d often meet with different families from different traditions in something we called a ‘house church.’ I was at one of our services, when I said, ‘God wherever you are, here I am!’ In that moment, I felt flooded with a divine presence that brought my awareness to a new level. Before then, church had been boring, but this moment started a whole new spiritual journey. I began writing poetry and discovering new feelings. I saw that church was not just something you do on Sunday—I wanted to be part of it in a real and holistic way.”

Cannon’s faith journey accelerated in college. “There were two seminaries on campus and I loved the classes I took there—I just wish I’d taken more! Delving into Scripture and acknowledging my interest in pursuing the priesthood was a big step.” His interest in understanding other religious faiths, such as Zen Buddhism, has since

taken him to China, Martinique and France. “My experience at the FTE Ministry Conference was transformational,” Cannon says. “It was amazing to see the diversity of experience and passions, and all sorts of traditions coming together to share our own walk toward Christ. Sometimes we get isolated in our own ‘bubble,’ trapped in our own seminary or church or mind. FTE merged all of the bubbles together or popped them, and I’ll continue to grow with that approach.”

Cannon spoke at his brother’s ordination and included one of his favorite Bible verses about growing into service, Ephesians 4:11-12. “Essentially, it says that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, all to equip the saints for the work of ministry.”

Cannon feels drawn to serve in parish ministry, a place where he can build the strong community life that meant so much to him as a child, and also help “reveal a vibrancy about the church that is there every day and every moment. For too many people, the church has nothing to do with the rest of their lives beyond Sunday...I want to change that.”



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that Jesus said instead
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Harvard Divinity School, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Elizabeth Leavitt was ready for law school: she'd been a political science major at the University of Oregon and had already taken the LSAT exam. "I had an abiding interest in pursuing law or politics in order to create change," she remembers. At the same time, Leavitt knew she had experienced "a quiet inkling that I wanted to be a pastor ever since I was in middle school."

Her desire for service that creates change led Leavitt to take a year before starting law school to volunteer with AmeriCorps, where she worked full-time with students learning English as a second language. She taught, tutored, translated and mentored. The experience rekindled a sense of fulfillment that Leavitt had felt years earlier as a teenager, when she had traveled to Latin America—learning Spanish, gaining awareness of poverty and volunteering in a medical clinic in rural Honduras.

She also realized that, "while I liked the sense of making a difference, I wasn't sure that education or pursuing law would really fit with my gifts."

Then a call came from the church where she'd seen "great models of what it means to be a committed and thoughtful Christian." The church youth director had left, and Leavitt was asked to apply for the job. For the next two years, law school stayed on hold while Leavitt worked as the church's director of children's and high school ministry. "I was getting to know a demographic I didn't know before,"

says Leavitt. She was also getting to know that she wanted to pursue a theological education.

"My journey of faith has influenced my life in a profound way," Leavitt says. "I had such a broad exposure to the message in the Gospel about how to care for others. I also saw people who were living that Gospel message out. I felt motivated to pursue that path myself and to share it with other people."

Leavitt also found her calling could encompass her interests in public policy and in issues related to poverty, health care and the environment. "I'd like to bring those sensibilities into congregations," she notes. "How do we do the things that Jesus said instead of just reading the Bible stories? How do we see people, help people and build communities?"

Leavitt calls her cohort of FTE Fellows "amazing, inspiring and sometimes hilarious people who are pursuing ministry in different ways. It's exciting to know that these are the people who will be with me at the forefront of leading the church in a few years."

She's considering an FTE Ministry Project that will explore "creative and innovative ways to worship, to shake things up a bit. I don't think we should throw out all traditions, but I do think we should investigate what they mean to us, and then start to think about moving in new directions, directions that lead to vibrant clergy and vibrant congregations."



In terms of her own direction, Leavitt believes "exploring is an important part of the faith journey. The right thing will present itself—and then there's always one more step, a step each one of us can take with a little encouragement."

Gerald “Jay” Williams



Jay Williams had so many options for his future, it seemed like the only way to narrow the field was by the process of elimination. Growing up in a “fairly impoverished neighborhood” on the East Side of Buffalo, N.Y., Williams had risen through multiple honors programs (including one that had him doing cancer research on Fridays as a high school senior). The trajectory led to Harvard University, where he began as a pre-med major. “It was that ‘Cosby Show’ syndrome,” laughs Williams. “If you want to be successful, be a doctor or a lawyer!”

Midway through his freshman year, he realized that medicine “wasn’t what made me tick.” Williams automatically thought of pre-law before his thoughts turned to “something that was always a deep part of my life: my church.” Williams switched his major to religion and, at the same time, engaged in “conversations

Union Theological Seminary, United Methodist Church

about changing the world. I began to see how geopolitical trends are influenced by money, and I realized I didn’t have much experience with finance.” After winning a prestigious internship with Merrill Lynch, Williams headed to Wall Street after graduation, receiving a series of promotions in the realm of private banking.

“While I learned a lot about how things work,” he recalls, “my heart wasn’t in it. For as long as I could remember, people had been telling me to be a preacher, but I hadn’t owned it until then. I thought, ‘why not try seminary?’ and gave my resignation. People said I was crazy to walk away from the money. But I knew I couldn’t be authentic to myself if I didn’t do it.”

When he started at Union, Williams got the chance to “reflect about why I’d committed so much time to the church, how much I loved doing everything there, from menial work to the more ‘glamorous’ tasks. There was nothing that made me happier.” Now Williams feels his calling is “to the parish, but in a broader sense in terms of community work. I have strong heart for Africa, the African Diaspora, and international policy.” He has twice traveled to Sudan in the midst of the country’s civil war, joining the movement to liberate thousands of modern-day slaves and raise awareness about their plight. “It changed my outlook on everything...especially interviewing people who had been slaves, who just asked that I tell their story.” For his FTE Ministry Project, Williams

hopes to return to Africa “to find some way to connect with U.S. communities and explore how we become better advocates for Africa.”

The church itself has an advocacy role to play, says Williams. “Jesus said, ‘If you love me and want to follow me, feed my sheep. Stand with the least and the lost.’ I think personal faith has to manifest in a social way.”

Williams notes that his time as an FTE Ministry Fellow has been valuable. “I feel I’m not in this alone during times when ministry can be lonely. As young people, we’re called to lead by example, even while we’re still figuring life out. It’s good to be part of a community of folks who understand that.”

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Kristin White



Kristin White was living exactly the kind of life she wanted. Happily married and the mother of a young daughter, she and her husband had found a great old house in a wonderful neighborhood. She was enjoying her teaching job and her husband was loving his work with Habitat for Humanity. But things took an unexpected turn when she went to a party celebrating a friend's ordination.

"She was the first woman our church had ordained," says White. "I thought I'd stop by, hug her and leave...but I saw someone there who had been trying to talk me into pursuing a Ph.D. and she introduced me to one of her professors." Minutes into the conversation, the professor told White, "Maybe you need to think about ministry, because the church needs you." Then, right where they were talking, the woman who was going to be ordained came in and laid out her vestments on an ironing board in front of White. "I had a clear vision of myself behind the altar,

Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, Episcopal Church

raising the bread in consecration. It came from something outside of me, and it was terrifying—because I had already sculpted this other life!"

After talking with her husband who was "not surprised—and supportive—from the first moment," White met with a priest and asked, "Does this sound like a call? He said, 'yes, I see that too.' So I decided to go as far as I could."

White and her family moved to Evanston, Illinois so she could attend seminary, and she's found "every step has become more and more solid." White sees herself serving as a parish priest with a focus on community organizing work. "I want to serve people even beyond the pews...ministering to the spiritual needs of members and then asking them to go out in the world and do the work God wants us to do. When I was a child, our priest used to say after dismissal, 'the worship has ended, let the service begin.' I'm in-tune with that."

White's own history of service includes political organizing, training teachers in a writing program and serving as a sign language interpreter in a ministry program for the deaf.

For her FTE Ministry Project, White will draw from those earlier experiences of political organizing to explore where faith and politics meet today in American society. Concerns about war, economic recession and global warming "are moral issues," says White, "and I believe the church has a stake in addressing them. I think we need to find more than just a way to

talk about these issues; I believe we are called to do something that brings about change in a way that is consistent with our Christian witness."

Key to her efforts to bring about change will be building a variety of relational networks, face-to-face as well as on the Internet.

Being supported by FTE has meant "being able to know a broad diversity of people...it's touched my life in ways I may not recognize for some time." Although White's life is different now from her former ideal, she has found it immensely rewarding. "Seminary and this whole process of discernment have sharpened, refined and grown my faith."



“Seminary and this whole process of discernment have sharpened, refined and grown my faith.”

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Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Evangelical Covenant Church

Jon Bergstrom's calling began on an island, without electricity, running water or "any sense of time."

Starting in the fifth grade, Bergstrom left his home in southwest Chicago once a year to attend Covenant Point Bible Camp on an island in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. His family was very involved in church, but his congregation's youth program "was dwindling," Bergstrom remembers. "Camp is where I found and based my faith... although, early on, I never thought too much about being a pastor—I wanted to be a rock star! But camp is where I formed my spiritual growth—where I began to understand that faith should inform how I live. I've always been a deep thinker. I've always wondered, 'Why are we here?'"

In subsequent summers, Bergstrom served as a camp counselor himself. He returned to high school "seeing that I was a little different. I was asking philosophical questions other students weren't asking. I wanted to understand other faiths, like Buddhism, and had a desire to be deeply engaged."

This desire led Bergstrom to Gustavus Adolphus College, where he majored in religion. He spent his junior year in India, where he studied and worked with a community development nonprofit focused on women's empowerment and assisting those whom the country's caste system deemed "untouchable." Along with other student volunteers, Bergstrom says he gained new perspective on "social involvement

and how the Gospel calls us to work for peace and justice. It took me outside my comfort zone. But it also showed me how power works within Christianity—how we are called to be servants and to give away power to others."

As his "gradual" call to ministry intensified, Bergstrom thought about going to seminary. But he also "wanted to take time off, to see how those thoughts would stand up." He'd seen how experiencing life in a poor village could cause an "academic understanding of the world to come crashing down," so he joined the Peace Corps and spent two years in the Kyrgyz Republic.

This time, Bergstrom was on his own—learning the language, drinking tea with locals and living what he calls a "ministry of being present." His presence helped start a community center that provided milk and nutrition information to village children in grade school and also supported an English club for older students.

Now in seminary, Bergstrom is working to "decipher if I have a call to parish ministry." His experience with FTE has provided "a deep feeling of peace and a better understanding of why I'm in seminary. It's been a great experience to see people from different denominations coming together to explore the same cause and purpose." For his FTE Ministry Project, he's considering returning to his church camp roots by developing a peace and justice curriculum for high school students or "developing a faith discussion group within the Peace Corps...to provide spiritual support."



Wherever he ends up, Bergstrom plans on taking along a lesson from his time in the Kyrgyz Republic: "I struggled every day with the Western idea of how things need to constantly improve and get better, and I often felt incompetent. It taught me about the need to rely on grace. Anything that comes about is God's work. I'm not the one creating change. I'm just making the space available within for God to work through me."

Rebecca Spurrier



Growing up, Rebecca Spurrier did not have to look far to see examples of people living lives of vocation. The daughter of medical missionaries, Spurrier spent the first 13 years of her life in a small rural community in Zambia, where her parents provided badly needed care to local residents. “I was always conscious of the integration of ministry with social concerns, and of my passion for getting involved,” remembers Spurrier. “But if you had told me two or three years ago that I’d have a desire to go to theological school, I would have been shocked.”

When she returned to the U.S. at the age of 13, Spurrier felt drawn to study English because of a “love of stories.” After graduating from Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Mich., Spurrier went to the Ukraine to teach English. “I enjoyed interacting with people of different cultures and looking at how language influences and creates a basis for community,” she remembers.

Candler School of Theology, Brethren in Christ

Following three years of teaching, Spurrier stayed in the Ukraine to work with the Mennonite Central Committee, a relief and development organization where she worked with a women’s group that responded to the needs of the elderly and disabled. She also helped distribute grant funds to village schools and health centers. She encountered Christian communities starting to blossom where they were once forbidden.

Along the way, “several people in church and school talked to me about studying theology, and I became more aware of the process of discernment,” says Spurrier. She now believes her future will involve “thinking creatively about addressing social issues that emerge in worship communities. I can’t imagine a life without the church, and church communities have always been the places that created a space in which I could imagine my future.” She thinks her FTE Ministry Project will somehow focus on liturgical theology and the way worship practices shape communities. “I’m interested in how the church creates a broader space for people who are kept at the periphery—people with mental and physical disabilities, women and those who come from other countries—and how to make church a place for all kinds of people to be and to think.”

As her journey continues, Spurrier hopes to draw upon her life’s lessons from living “in different places and adapting to different situations. True ministry means engagement with diverse groups of people...we don’t get to choose who goes to church. God calls different kinds of people to live in harmony together, so you have to creatively imagine the worlds that people come from. Whatever I do will involve helping communities think wider than their own little place on earth.”



“I was always conscious of the integration of ministry with social concerns, and of my passion for getting involved. But if you had told me two or three years ago that I’d have a desire to go to theological school, I would have been shocked.”

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Candler School of Theology, Progressive National Baptist

Kim Jackson may be a few years away from ordination, but that doesn't mean she hasn't been gathering experience that informs her journey.

Jackson remembers growing up in a small South Carolina town. "I always wanted to play 'church' with my brother—and I always wanted to be the pastor!" As she got older, Jackson's aspirations moved to teaching, spurred on by the consideration of "people in my life who have touched me the most" and the realization that, as a woman in the National Baptist denomination, a career in the pulpit might not be open to her. Even though she grew up as a "church kid" of devoted parents, "for 17 years of my life, I couldn't say out loud that I wanted to be a minister."

During her freshman year of college, a religion class and an encouraging professor showed Jackson that "many customs and cultures believed women can be ministers," and it sparked the realization that "I really wanted to do ministry...to come back to my first love. I have this thing about hope, which is what also drove me to think about being a teacher...giving kids hope. Education gives hope, and that's also what ministry is about—hope, healing and encouragement, in whatever form that takes, in a world that needs it."

Jackson's perspective on the world was widened during a trip to Cuba, where she met with ministers, visited orphanages and learned about "ministry being done in unique ways... including a community garden that was led by a non-traditional minister whose goal was

to offer hope through fruit and vegetables!"

Jackson's interest in extending hope also led to work with the homeless in Atlanta, where her faith was "definitely challenged. For so much of my life, I could say 'God is clearly present'...but faced with homelessness on such a large scale, it seemed as if prayers weren't answered, at least not in the way I thought." The experience showed Jackson that God was present "in the face of a woman whose hair had not been combed in weeks, whose clothes were ragged. She offered me a message of hope—she was not down, she was not sad; I was serving as her chaplain but, in fact, she was ministering to me!"

As Jackson considers where her calling might take her—and knowing that each church in her denomination is autonomous in deciding whether or not to ordain women—one of her hopes for her theological education is that it will validate her gifts in her local church community.

Meeting other FTE Fellows "who are my age and interested in ministry—and other women who are from traditions where they cannot be ordained and still press on—was incredible to me. They are still committed to their faith and to their calling. To not be alone in the journey is helpful beyond words."



Sean Lanigan



Obstacles that at first glance seemed impassable have instead made Sean Lanigan clear and certain about his calling.

Lanigan was an altar server while in the fourth grade in Green Bay, Wisconsin. “Something about it seemed right even though being a priest was already on the ‘uncool’ list for my age group!” He was already thinking about “doing some kind of service,” and had even considered a ‘mobile career.’ “The first thing I wanted to be was a bus driver...because it meant being a purveyor of hospitality who could meet, see and serve all kinds of people.”

As he got older, Lanigan realized, “I was different than other people my age. I could tell there was an ‘in’ club and an ‘out’ club. And, I was very unsure of whether I still wanted to be Catholic.” At Swarthmore College, Lanigan met Pauline Allen, the Quaker director of the campus’ Protestant

Yale University Divinity School, Roman Catholic Church

ministry. Allen asked him to help plan informal worship services and retreats. “She had a quiet way about her,” Lanigan remembers. “She saw potentialities in me, and named them.” Although Allen passed away from breast cancer a year after Lanigan met her, she remained in his thoughts as he completed college, started teaching high school and began to consider ministry as a vocation.

Lanigan used his time as a teacher to “listen to God more carefully.” He was drawn to divinity school and began to articulate his own calling. Lanigan sees his “potential to help people have a more expansive Christian vision. In a state of fear, we all tend to close in on ourselves. I think I’m called to help resist that, even when it’s hard... Jesus is a radical model of not shying away from what society says is ‘unclean’. Let’s look at what Christ valued and see if we are living it out.”

Lanigan wants “to craft a way to be a Christian leader with a socio-political consciousness. For his FTE Ministry Project, Lanigan will root his concerns for the marginalized in direct service. He will live and work in a L’Arche community in Edinburgh, Scotland, where the teachings of Henri Nouwen inform and shape the ministry; to understand ourselves as beloved of God in the midst of our brokenness. “I think the capacity of L’Arche communities to name and confront brokenness is a gift to the wider church and a vehicle to move us beyond individualism. It is a gift that I hope I will learn to better embody during my time in L’Arche.”

The gift he has received from being chosen as an FTE Ministry Fellow is “huge...having recognition that says, ‘we think you have potential’ is a big affirmation.” Lanigan says that affirmation will help him as he continues to pursue his dream of “helping people find God. The real potential for healing is for people to know God—for God not to be distant in their lives.”



“Having recognition that says, ‘we think you have potential’ is a big affirmation.”

Diana Batzka



When a young Diana Batzka imagined her future, she first saw herself in the White House, leading her country as president. “I thought it would be a chance to help people on a grand scale. That’s what motivates me. I held onto that dream for a long time, until I realized that politics was about more than that...and that there were other—perhaps better—ways to serve.”

Batzka entered college thinking about becoming a teacher, with the idea of helping people still firmly fixed in her mind. During Holy Week of her sophomore year, the history major was sitting in a hallway, pondering a comment one of her friends had made days earlier—suggesting Batzka should consider ministry as a vocation.

“I had heard that before. This time, instead of laughing it off,” Batzka recalls, “I asked myself, ‘Why don’t I?’ The answer within filled my heart and soul.”

Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Her positive response also resonated with friends and family who gave her “wonderful affirmations...it seemed like they were more attuned to my heart’s desire than I was.”

Looking back on her process of discernment, Batzka says, “all the signs and clues were there,” yet outside support was critical to overcoming her own internal struggle with choosing the right path. Batzka believes having adults who support a young person’s interest in ministry is “absolutely vital.” It’s a much-needed counterpoint to “the negative way many people see the ministry, and the odd looks you get when you tell people that’s what you’re going to do.”

Batzka fondly remembers a laywoman youth ministry leader who encouraged her sense of call and who was recently ordained herself: “She announced her call just a month before I announced mine!”

Attending her first FTE Conference on Excellence in Ministry, Batzka feels connected in a new way. “For the first time I met the whole spectrum of young people who feel called to the ministry, including other women, those of different sexual orientations and those whose denominations may not be open to ordaining them, but who are committed to stepping through the door anyhow,” she says. “We look forward to being colleagues and friends who can call on each other ten years from now.”

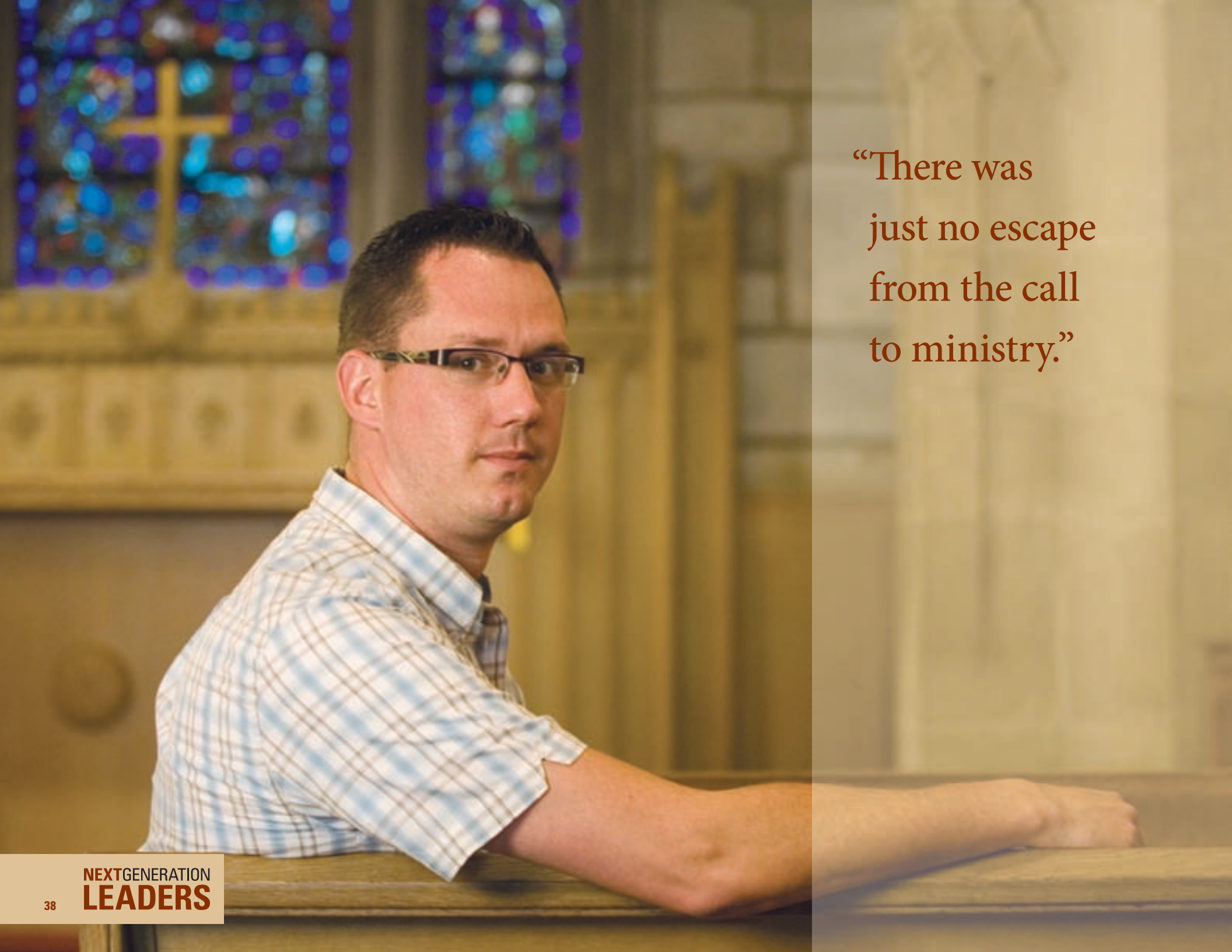
In the midst of her expanded awareness of the diversity of Christian traditions, Batzka will apply her FTE grant to asking the question, “What makes an excellent congregation?” She will read classic and modern texts on ecclesiology and also visit a variety of faith communities that are recognized for their health, vitality and commitment to love of God and neighbor.

She anticipates serving a local congregation, pairing her gifts for planning and organizing with the “wide perspective” of people and life she enjoys developing.

While she’s not precisely sure how her future will unfold, Batzka is certain that “My faith will inform everything I do. It grounds me in life—in loving and protecting people—and in caring for those who have less...not putting value on fame, power and money, but on relationships and the things that give life beauty and richness. I want to focus on what I’m learning, stay close to God and discover where I am needed.”

“My faith will inform everything I do. It grounds me in life—in loving and protecting people—and in caring for those who have less... not putting value on fame, power and money, but on relationships and the things that give life beauty and richness. I want to focus on what I’m learning, stay close to God and discover where I am needed.”





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to ministry.”

Saint Paul School of Theology, United Methodist Church

For a long time, Jamie Gehrke couldn't imagine becoming a pastor. He felt he was one of the last people on the planet who would be called to parish ministry. "I didn't think I was qualified," he says.

He was, in his words, "a late bloomer." As a teenager in Missouri, Gehrke wandered far from his childhood Christian faith. Uncertain about his professional calling, he spent six years in the Marine Corps reserves, held positions in social work, and even considered law school, taking the LSAT twice. But these experiences left him dissatisfied. A born leader, Gehrke had the nagging sense that he could be doing much more. He also felt a rekindling of faith, and a persistent inner pull toward ordained ministry. Others also told him he had gifts for ministry—but he wasn't sure he was "the kind of guy anyone would want to lead a church."

Finally, he surrendered. "There was just no escape from the call to ministry," he says. "I got tired of fighting it."

Now thriving in his second year at Saint Paul School of Theology, and as a licensed pastor working toward ordination in the United Methodist Church, Gehrke says it's a relief to be living the vocation he spent so long resisting. On the weekends, he serves as pastor to a rural church thirty miles east of Kansas City, in a town with a population of just over 200. He and his wife and their two children see cornfields out their back window. "Some people say that a small pastorate like this is just a training exercise,"

he says. "But this is a real and meaningful appointment that touches people's lives."

Being named an FTE Ministry Fellow has helped clarify his commitment to congregational ministry. Initially, Gehrke wondered if the other Ministry Fellows would be younger than he was (many were) or if they would be attending more well-known universities (some did). Meeting them, he realized those differences didn't matter, and that he, too, belongs on the pastoral leadership path. At the FTE conference, Gehrke quickly found his niche; his natural warmth and leadership fostered new friendships and significant ties that continue today. "We made intense connections that I hope will last a lifetime," he says. "My FTE experience confirmed my call to ministry."

Gehrke's FTE Ministry Project aims to put a human face on the restorative justice movement. He plans to interview five or six families who have lost loved ones to violence and who, in the aftermath, have asked for clemency for the perpetrator. Says Gehrke: "I want to know how these families came to forgive the perpetrators—or, if they have not forgiven them, how they have still come to take a stand against the death penalty."

While Gehrke looks forward to the days when he no longer has to divide his time between research projects, seminary classes and parish ministry, being a seminary student, he says, remains a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.



"I love being in school," he confesses. "I can't separate my academic journey from my faith journey." Honoring both the God of reason and the God of faith, Gehrke finally has started to accept what others knew long before he did: he's precisely the kind of guy you want going into congregational ministry.

Erin Bouman



One of Erin Bouman's best teachers is barely out of a booster seat. Her five-year-old son "is one of my most challenging conversation partners in spirituality" says Bouman. "He asks great questions about big concepts, like 'Is it a rule that everyone has to be friends?' and 'What happens when we die?' I want to have answers that are meaningful and sensible, filled with integrity. That's exactly what I think good theology should be—satisfying, and not dishonest."

Bouman's own search for answers began in a church tradition "that didn't ordain women, so I had some questions about what it would mean to pursue ministry." A natural leader, she found she "wanted to do something significant, focused on what was good in the world. But people always said to me, 'I'll bet you'll be a lawyer.' They never said, 'I'll bet you'll be a pastor.'"

University of Chicago Divinity School, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

An internship at a Lutheran-affiliated nonprofit organization brought her a different understanding of what might be possible. "It widened my picture," she remembers. "There was a wonderful spirit—one that was empowering and energizing." At the time, Bouman initially felt she "needed distinct lines" between church and nonprofit work, then realized, "I was kidding myself that the work we were doing wasn't a ministry." When pastors who managed the nonprofit asked her if she had considered ministry, "it jostled me," said Bouman. "I'd had impulses and feelings about becoming a pastor, but I didn't deeply consider it until I was asked in a positive, supportive way...it was my 'thunderclap!'"

After living a short time in New York City, Bouman and her husband headed to Tanzania, where she spent several years teaching reading, math, art and computer skills at an elementary-level boarding school. Her experience with the program, which was run in partnership with a New York church, have led Bouman to consider developing an FTE Ministry Project which "would focus on international dialogue—how it can change both cultures and create models for consensus-building and positive change."

It's an exercise Bouman feels would be especially helpful at a time when "so many American churches are asking: 'How do we hold together amid diversity? When many churches are struggling with issues around subjects like sexual identity, can we still disagree? Do we need to draw a line or should we draw a wider circle?'"

Bouman found the 'circle' created at her first FTE conference to be "a spiritually deepening space...with lots of diversity and lots of life-giving laughter! It's encouraging to see there are so many vital people, and it makes you think, 'ministry may not always be easy, but I want to be a part of this.'"

When considering her own path, this mother of two with a variety of interests feels she's "becoming more and more drawn to parish ministry and its variety—being involved with the congregation and the seasons of the church." No matter where she lands, Bouman's hope is "to pursue a profession that has deeper elements. Faith is at the heart of it. I try to trust and follow where God has been leading me."

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‘I bet you’ll be a lawyer.’
They never said, ‘I bet
you’ll be a pastor.’”



David Chang



David Chang was a high school junior when he envisioned his future.

Kneeling in the midst of prayer at a Friday night worship service, Chang recalls that a picture appeared in his mind “of the world at night, with all of the affluent countries lit up brightly, and the rest of the earth in darkness.”

“I felt overwhelmed. There was so much empty dark space. I asked God, ‘How can one person change this?’ Then another image came up. It was another picture of the world at night, but it had little dots all over it showing where people were praying...it made me think that maybe that is what God ‘sees’, that this is what the world looks like to Him when people pray. I had often been afraid that finding the right way to serve God was going to somehow pass me by in life. But it became clear to me that God is looking for leaders to use—and that I might be one of

Wesley Theological Seminary, United Methodist Church

them. The picture I saw of the world that night seemed to be saying that you don’t have to go out and reach everyone. You do what you can with different people in every part of the world. Get them inspired and become a part of the light.”

The son of Korean-American missionaries, Chang grew up in Bangladesh and India, where he attended boarding school before coming to the U.S. in his sophomore year to prepare for an American college education. “When people meet me, they assume I’ve lived in the States my whole life!” says Chang. “I think when you’ve lived in lots of different settings, different socioeconomic backgrounds, you tend to adjust quicker.” Plus, Chang says, “I’ve always loved talking to people, watching and thinking about how people form certain patterns of behavior.” After studying psychology at the University of Illinois, Chang worked for a year at a psychiatric hospital in a teen residential ward. “It was spiritually and emotionally hard,” Chang remembers. “I found myself searching for a reason and a purpose for their suffering...for evidence that God was still in control of their lives.”

Coming out of that experience, Chang senses his call to ministry may involve a call to teach—one that uses his international perspective and experience. “I think about overseas missions in the context of teaching. I’d like to help form a seminary in a country that doesn’t have one, or get deeply involved in Bible-based leadership or counseling.”

For his FTE Ministry Project, Chang is considering working with young Korean-Americans who are “second-generational kids like me who have grown up in the crossroads of cultural identity. I’d like to set up weekday Bible studies led by students who minister to other students.”

“The biggest thing I have taken away as an FTE Ministry Fellow so far,” Chang says, “is how diverse and wide our Christian identity really is. Every aspect of the FTE conference was a learning experience: we explored different styles of worship, different types of youth ministries, the concepts of justice and what that looks like as outreach—it showed me an entire range of approaches to ministry.”

His own approach to his future is still rooted in the images Chang perceived of his place in the world years earlier in that pivotal moment of worship. “I feel that God doing his work is like waves crashing in the ocean. There’s a big wave coming, and I want to be a part of it.”

“I had often been afraid that finding the right way to serve God was going to somehow pass me by in life. But it became clear to me that God is looking for leaders to use—and that I might be one of them.”



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- ◆ More than 90 percent of FTE Ministry Fellows are now serving in congregations or church-related ministries.
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Our History

The Fund for Theological Education (FTE) was created in 1954 by leading educators, clergy and philanthropists—with support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund—who were concerned that the quality of students entering the ministry had declined and that many of the most gifted students were choosing other careers.

Under the leadership of such distinguished trustees as Harvard University President Nathan Pusey, Morehouse College President Benjamin E. Mays, historian and theologian Martin Marty and others, FTE has become a leading ecumenical advocate for excellence and diversity in Christian ministry and theological scholarship. The Fund has awarded nearly 6,000 fellowships in partnership with others committed to the future of quality leadership for the church.

FTE's work supports the next generation of leaders among pastors and scholars, providing more than \$1.5 million annually in fellowships and other support to gifted young people from all denominations and racial/ethnic backgrounds. The Fund also serves as a resource for congregations and for educational and faith communities in their role of identifying and encouraging young people to consider ministry as a vocation.

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Support the Next Generation

Dear Friends in Ministry,

I pray that the stories and faces you have encountered here offer you a glimpse of the future of pastoral leadership.

More importantly, I trust that hope has been born anew within you for the future of the church. Excellence in ministry is not simply the domain of those who have served for many years. It is alive and manifest in this diverse, creative, passionate generation of future young pastors, and—God willing—she or he is coming to your church, or one near you, very soon.

Surrounding these young leaders stands a community of partners who have noticed, named and nurtured their gifts for ministry. We have—for more than 50 years—been richly blessed through the support of foundations, congregations and individuals. But we cannot take this for granted.

To continue this work, we need your support: your financial contributions, your prayers, and your outreach to the next generation of pastoral leaders. We hope you will consider joining our work by becoming an FTE Next Generation Partner.

May God's blessings be with you, especially as they are embodied in the gifts and graces of amazing young FTE Ministry Fellows.

Peace,

The Rev. Dr. Trace Haythorn

President
The Fund for Theological Education

Our Mission

The Fund for Theological Education advocates excellence and diversity in pastoral ministry and theological scholarship.

Through our initiatives, we enable gifted young people throughout the Christian community to explore and respond to God's calling in their lives.

We seek to be a creative, informed catalyst for educational and faith communities in developing their own capacities to nurture men and women for vocations in ministry and teaching.

We also aim to awaken the larger community to the contributions of pastoral leaders and educators who act with faith, imagination and courage to serve the common good.



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Supporting the next generation of leaders for the church.

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