

AUDEMUS

To Members of the Board of Trustees and Close Friends of San Francisco Theological Seminary

November 2014

Dear Friends,

Greetings once again! It's been a busy and exciting fall, and only now am I able to put to paper this *Audemus* letter to you. I want to tell you about the recent launch of the Center for Innovation in Ministry.

As you may remember, a year and a half ago the SF'TS Board of Trustees adopted a new strategic plan. It emphasizes innovation, flexibility, greater access to programs, and a strong, vital connection with the Church. Since then, the Seminary has been moving full tilt to implement that plan. We've made a lot of progress. Already there's much to celebrate.

At the heart of the plan is the creation of a Center for Innovation in Ministry. Last month, we launched the Center with a spectacular event over two days. Dr. Jane McGonigal, a person well known in the gaming industry but not so much in the Church, keynoted. McGonigal is a visionary game designer and futurist, whose games challenge players to tackle real world problems like poverty, hunger, and climate change through planetary-scale collaboration. She's smart, she's winsome, and she makes you think.

She's created "games for good" for organizations such as the World Bank, the Olympic Games, the American Heart Association, the New York Public Library, and many more. Her book, *Reality Is Broken: How Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change The World*, is a *New York Times* bestseller. She also has several TED talks you can access via the Internet. Google her!

For the launch, she interacted with experts in the fields of education, community ministry, conflict resolution, theology, and game design. She pointed out that 99 percent of boys and 94 percent of girls ages 12-17 play video games. This same group of kids will likely play 10,000 hours of video games by the time they graduate from high school. That's about the same number of hours they will spend in school itself during this same period. We would hope, wouldn't we, at least some of these kids would become the next generation of the Church. That might be a challenge for those of us who's knowledge of games starts and ends with Frogger, Pac-Man, and DonkeyKong.

McGonigal has conducted extensive research on the skills young gamers are learning. She's identified four key qualities she believes make gamers excellent resources for positive action in the world:

1. Urgent optimism: believing that an "epic win" is possible
2. Weaving a tight social fabric: building bonds, trust, and cooperation
3. Blissful productivity: finding joy in hard, meaningful work
4. Epic meaning: connecting to a meaningful mission

Based on these qualities, she calls gamers “super-empowered, hopeful individuals” and she challenged the launch participants to think about how games might be employed in the work of ministry.

The next day these same participants were introduced to Smallify, an innovation-capacity building firm from the Silicon Valley. The Smallify process helps groups struggling with large issues – like homelessness, violence, or racism – break them down into smaller, purpose-driven, actionable pieces. When you do that, the cost of failures along the way, which are inevitable, become “forgivable.” This encourages groups to become more willing to take risks and embrace creativity.

It was amazing! I wish you could have experienced the energy in the rooms where these events were held! You can access more about the event here: <http://tinyurl.com/CenterLaunch>.

Equally amazing was the diversity of the participants themselves, nearly 200 of them. There were people there who had never been on a seminary campus before. There were unchurched folk. There were people in their twenties and people in their eighties and people in between. It was racially diverse, theologically diverse, and geographically diverse. We had someone from the White House, staff from the PC(USA) headquarters in Louisville, presbytery and synod executives, business people, pastors, students, faculty, a social worker, a physical therapist, a cartoonist, a jazz musician, and some “techie.”

It was a magnificent start for an important addition to the Seminary’s educational assets. As one of the participants wrote in her blog: “Who would’ve think that such an unlikely meeting of radically different minds would result in such an inspiring, creative, playful and powerful few days? And yet, that’s exactly what happened.”

We want the Center for Innovation in Ministry to increase the capacity of the Church for innovation. We want to bring together innovators with each other and bring innovators together with people of faith who have been dreaming of new forms of church and ministry.

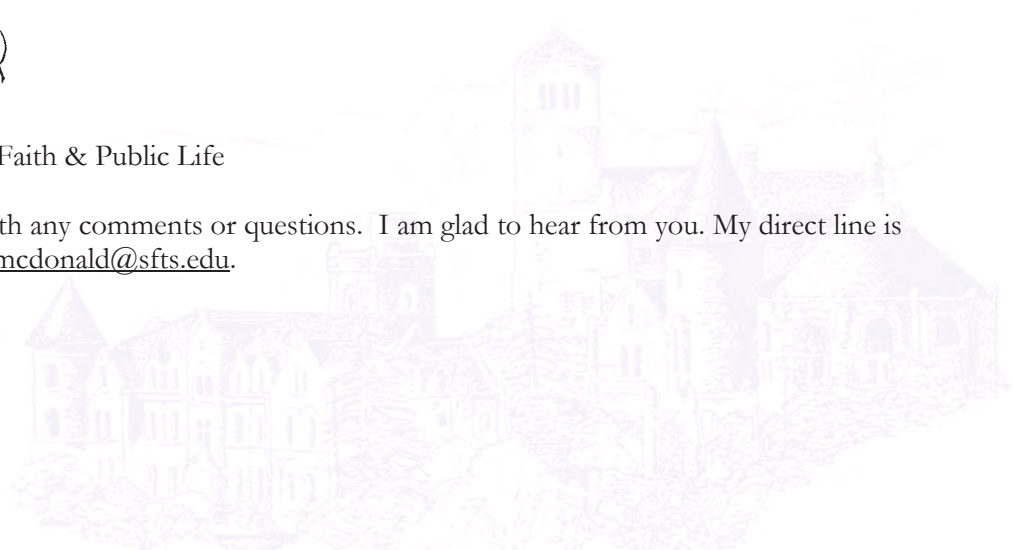
As Center Director Rev. Sherri Hausser puts it: “The Center is not just another think tank. We are a ‘think, do, and be tank.’ We are intent on bringing together unlikely partners for conversation, collaboration and creativity for the good of the Church and the world.”

Grace and peace,



Jim McDonald
President and Professor of Faith & Public Life

P.S. – Please be in touch with any comments or questions. I am glad to hear from you. My direct line is 415.451.2810. My email is jmcdonald@sfts.edu.



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