

# AUDEMUS

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

October 2015

Dear Friends,

It's been a busy time, with lots of good things happening. Our enrollment is up. Across all our degree programs we welcomed 50 new students to campus this fall! They are diverse. They are bright. And they are bringing a new energy to the entire community. We are rejoicing, giving thanks to God for this blessing.

But we are not resting on our laurels. We are moving forward to ramp up our recruitment and enrollment efforts even more over this next year.

And we need your help.

We are seeking women and men who have the aptitude for innovative, transformative ministries. We are looking for people who are motivated by their faith to make the world a better place.

All of us should be thinking about the next generation of leaders for the Church of Jesus Christ, should we not? Where will they come from, the future leaders of the Church? These days it's countercultural to think about a vocation in ministry. Sometimes young people, especially, need a little encouragement from someone they look up to and admire. That would be YOU! Can you identify one or two people in your community of faith who fit the bill? Tell them they should consider SFTS. This is a seminary that both supports and challenges our students. We are the right choice for many people interested in ministry for the 21st century.

We have a cutting-edge curriculum and a dynamic faculty. The interdisciplinary lectures this fall, for example, are focused on the topic of healing. Every Wednesday morning, Scott 101 is packed with faculty, students and staff for these amazing lectures/presentations. Every week we hear a fresh perspective on this important subject. And the discussions that follow are lively. Personally, I look forward to this every week, and I always learn something.

In early September, just before classes began, we had a three-day consultation focused on the Center for Innovation in Ministry. And what an intense and stimulating experience it was! Thirty-three people came, a diverse group in terms of age, life experience, ethnicity and race, and denominational affiliation. There were SFTS students and alumni. Five current trustees came, along with a number of staff. The entire faculty was engaged. We also had a group of people – about a third of the group, actually – who were Presbyterians without an SFTS connection, and five of the group came from other walks of life altogether. One person, who worked in an innovative organization here in the Bay Area, had no religious affiliation at all.

The leadership for the consultation came from Dave Viotti, the CEO of Smallify, and several members of his team. Smallify, a Silicon Valley-based group that helped us launch the Center a year ago, is self-described as

“an innovation capacity-building firm. We answer the “how” question about innovation. We show you how to solve problems and seize opportunities faster, better and at lower cost. We do this through our rapid innovation lab.”

So, for three days, Dave and his team took our diverse group through their “rapid innovation lab,” focusing us on the possibilities for the Center for Innovation in Ministry.

The Smallify process (<http://smallify.it>) that engaged us looked like this:



We generated eight prototypes for Center initiatives. We think two to three of the initiatives (i.e., Small Bets) can be implemented reasonably soon – say by the spring of 2016.

The participants agreed that the Center needs a director and we’ve opened a search process for such a person. You’ll find the job description on our website.

We are also seeking funders/investors that might provide three years of start-up funding that would allow us to implement our “Small Bets” and begin to fill in the picture for what the Center can and should do. If you have some ideas along this line, send them our way.

In early October, the SFTS Board of Trustees met. The heart of the meeting was about shaping a future vision for SFTS. It was a conversation in three parts.

They began by listening to the faculty, who described in insightful and self-revealing ways the adaptive challenges they face in their teaching, and some of the ways they have tried to respond to those challenges. They are an impressive group.

The second part of the conversation focused on the Center for Innovation in Ministry as a key initiative in the Seminary’s response to our adaptive challenges. The board heard both faculty and trustees who had participated in the September consultation describe the process and its outcomes.

In these discussions a tension emerged. How much should the Center provide skills and offer solutions for pastors and others facing difficult environments for ministry in a changing society? And how much should the Center foster an ethos of innovation that encourages pastors and others to experiment and try new things without assurance that they will succeed? Over time, of course, we hope the Center will be able to do both. But as we move forward, the question looms, where should we focus our initial efforts?

The third part of the Trustees’ conversation addressed our readiness to begin a capital campaign. And, after a careful and prayerful discernment process and a thoughtful, candid discussion, the Trustees agreed wholeheartedly that now is the time. They are ready to mount a robust, energetic campaign as a fundamental way of supporting the realization of SFTS’ potential and achieving our future vision.

And so, we are “off and running,” as the saying goes. Professors are teaching. Students are learning. We are living in the present and preparing for the future. In faith, we are seeking to live into the New Creation given to us in Jesus Christ. It’s an exciting time to be alive.

Please pray for SFTS and the future we are seeking to live into, with God’s help and by God’s grace.

Rev. Dr. James L. McDonald  
President and Professor of Faith & Public Life

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