

AUDEMUS

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

OCTOBER 2016

Dear Friends,

A lot of good and exciting things are happening this fall at San Francisco Theological Seminary. But none is more exhilarating than what is happening at the Center for Innovation in Ministry. The Director, Rev. Floyd Thompkins, has brought a compelling vision for the Center in terms of its purpose and impact. He has also engaged a remarkable and diverse array of partners in the effort to realize the Center's vision.

Floyd's vision for the Center took the kernel of the idea that preceded his arrival and germinated it into something more substantive and exciting. He drew on the work of two seminal thinkers to articulate a theological rationale for the Center: Ed Farley and Howard Thurman.

- Farley said, "Christians are inevitably engaged every day in existential responses to the world, and theology concerns the wisdom by which one brings the resources of a religious tradition to bear on the world. This task calls not for indifference or innocence or naïveté but wisdom—the ability to assess what is going on and to appraise new possibilities."
- Thurman said, "All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. Such is the growing edge [which is] *the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and [people] have lost their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash.*

The educational model underpinning the Center's work flows from the groundbreaking work of Paulo Freire, whose book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* recognizes that important, even life-giving wisdom resides in the community of those who have experienced the trauma, harm, and indignity of oppression and injustice, and that that wisdom can provide the basis for solutions to seemingly intractable problems and dysfunctional, exploitative systems. This is often referred to as "education from below."

Floyd has also borrowed from the world of business and management to operationalize innovation in how the Center functions. As he puts it: "Innovation is not just a new idea; it's an idea that people care about and are willing to adopt." And, he adds, "As communities of faith engaged with the broader world, we should seek to innovate in ways that proclaim the gospel by making the world a better place through the pursuit of

justice, peace, and healing. The Center’s work itself should contain the real possibility for social and spiritual transformation.”

Floyd is also clear that innovation cannot be owned, controlled or prevented. At the same time, it’s possible and important to recognize, connect with, and support innovation that is already happening. So, the Center’s approach is to support innovation by keeping it focused on the possibilities for doing good in the world and by encouraging faith communities themselves to join in the innovative works of others, bringing their faith, hope, and love to bear on the opportunities and challenges at hand. Floyd believes that the Center should be flexible, nimble, open, experimental, authentic, and unafraid to take risks and (sometimes) fail. In sum, the work of the Center must be incarnational, urged on by, and embodying, the love of God for the world in Jesus Christ.

To this vision, Floyd has attracted an impressive group of partners. Here’s a sampling:

- The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute at Stanford University and its Director, Dr. Clayborne Carson.
- Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, including the congregation, its ordained and lay leadership, and its pastor emeritus, Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr.
- Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes, senior minister of Countryside Community Church in Omaha, Nebraska, and his network of some 400 congregations in the United Church of Christ who subscribe to his blog, *Darkwood Brew*, that offers “groundbreaking video resources to individual and small groups exploring ‘convergent’ Christian faith and values.” (Check it out: <http://darkwoodbrew.org>)
- Kaiser Permanente, including its CEO Bernard Tyson and Vice President Enitan Adesanya, who is also the Chair of the SFTS Board.
- Stanford social psychology professors Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt, 2014 MacArthur “genius grant” recipient, and Dr. Hazel Markus, faculty director of the Stanford Research Center for Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity.
- SFTS alums Rev. Janie Spahr and Rev. Bear Ride, and the leadership of all three LBGTQ-focused advocacy groups within the Presbyterian Church (USA)--More Light, Covenant Network, and That All May Freely Serve.

The Alexander Montgomery Foundation. Each of these partners (and others not named here) are eager to bring their financial resources to the initiatives Floyd and others here at SFTS are generating. But there was also an initial reluctance on the part of some to give directly to a religious organization. This does not reflect on SFTS in particular. Rather, it is an acknowledgement that religion, including Christianity, is so emotionally and ideologically fraught in our society that most secular institutions do not want to give directly to religious organizations because of the precedent it would set, which would then open the door to contention and division within the donor organization itself when other religious groups were proposed for funding.

So, last May, the SFTS Board recognized the need to establish a separate 501c3 non-religious foundation to receive and disburse the gifts that many of the Center's partners are ready to offer. Over the summer, a Board-appointed committee explored various options for how this barrier to funding for the Center's initiatives could be addressed. On August 31, the Alexander Montgomery Foundation was formed. Articles of Incorporation were approved, a slate of officers was elected, and the opening of a bank account was authorized. The Foundation is now incorporated in the state of California, a bank account has been opened, and the initial board of the foundation, which consists of the SFTS Board's Executive Committee, is in the process of approving a set of by-laws.

For all intents and purposes, the foundation is now up and running. The specific purpose of the foundation is "seek, receive, and disburse funding that supports the preparation of leaders and communities interested in promoting justice, peace, and a holistic approach to personal healing and community development."

I encourage you to go to the new website for the Center for Innovation in Ministry at innovation.sfts.edu. There you will see how Floyd's compelling vision and the lively interest of the incredible and impressive array of partners have come together for some exciting, fresh initiatives that will not only transform the educational experience at SFTS, but also bring new possibilities for justice, peace, and healing to the world that God loves so much.

Grace and peace to you,



Rev. Dr. James L. McDonald

President and Professor of Faith in Public Life

P.S. – I welcome your comments, questions, and ideas. You can be in touch with me by [responding to this email](mailto:response@sfts.edu) or calling me on my direct line at 415.451.2810. Thank you so much for your prayers and support. Together we can create a new kind of seminary for the 21st century.



San Francisco
Theological Seminary

In Christ. A New Creation.