

“Ferguson, Clergy, and the Faith that Fuels their Lives”

Dr. Leah Gunning Francis, Associate Dean of
Contextual Education, Eden Theological Seminary
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On June 4, the NBA welcomed Dr. Leah Gunning Francis, associate dean of contextual education at Eden Theological Seminary, to provide the keynote presentation and dialogue at the Open House and Blessing event at NBA’s new office space at Union Avenue Christian Church in St. Louis.

Gunning Francis described her upcoming book, *Faith and Ferguson: Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community*, as a collection of stories and emergent issues that she hopes will spur conversation that translates into strategic action. She explores the role of the church as a safe sanctuary and what we are truly meant to be in our communities. “Change is up to us,” she said. “We’ve got to be the church!”

Gunning Francis reflected on how her family and congregation began to “pray with their feet” and marched with community members in Ferguson during the weeks after Michael Brown’s shooting. She spoke of her work with mothers of black sons. “These are our sons; this is our fight,” she said. “We will not tolerate these killings.”

Regarding her experiences and learnings with the clergy and activists related to Ferguson and the fight for racial justice, Gunning Francis encouraged the collective group to “awaken our senses” to the situation and environment around us. She asked us all to consider:

- Sight: We are required to see things anew, and through new lenses.
- Sound: We need to hear from unlikely people—the young, and those on the fringes—those who are often the unheard voices but who are now demanding to be seen and heard.
- Smell: We must trust our intuition; when we think something “smells fishy,” we’re usually right.
- Taste: We may need to taste “the bitter dregs of discomfort” as we engage in the risky work that requires the mirror to come to us. It may be uncomfortable, but it’s required.
- Touch: We need to truly touch the hands and hearts of others, by coming into close proximity and reaching out our own hands and hearts.

Faith and Ferguson: Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community by Dr. Leah Gunning Francis will be available in August 2015 through our Disciples’ partners at Chalice Press.