
**NOT MY FATHER'S SEMINARY:
LEADERSHIP LESSONS FOR A NEW PRESIDENT**
KATHARINE RHODES HENDERSON

Abstract: Our tumultuous times call us to free ourselves from some traditional notions of religious leadership, theological education, and institutional norms. We need resilient public leaders willing to engage some of the most difficult issues of our day. We need courageous religious leaders and institutions of firm faith and wise mind to forge new relationships, build new partnerships and movements, and master the techniques of twenty-first century media, money management, and entrepreneurship. Using my experiences as president of Auburn Theological Seminary to illustrate, I introduce characteristics and practices needed for effective religious leadership. I argue that women have distinctive leadership potential, which can and should be nurtured.

Leading Auburn Theological Seminary

I am now in my third year as president of Auburn Seminary. Stepping into this role is at once audacious, humbling, creative, all-absorbing and immensely joyful. It is knowing that everything that has come before has prepared me for this moment and that, every day, there is more to be learned to meet the challenges at hand. A recent dream, whose overall message seemed to affirm my leadership at Auburn, presented images of my mother in dreadlocks and war paint and emphasized the name of my maternal great-grandmother, Lela Bloodworth, referred to as a renowned abolitionist of slavery. At this charged juncture in my own career, the dream seemed to be saying, “trust that the courage and fierceness of your

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own matriarchs stand behind you, layer upon layer. We will uphold you. Now is your time. What do you feel is worth fighting for, worth expending your life's blood on?" My answer of course is Auburn, not so much in the sense of institution building, although that is certainly part of it, but more because of the potential impact that Auburn *unleashed* can make in the world.

I say "unleashed" because I believe that our times ask us to free ourselves from some traditional notions of religious leadership and theological education. To respond effectively to the challenges before us, we and our institutions need to move boldly and fluidly within the currents of our times.

Auburn's new tagline, introduced at my inauguration, captures this movement: Trouble the water, Heal the world. It says: flow, turbulent at times, but coursing toward justice and wholeness. It is meant to convey audacity and prayer, charge and invitation. It reaches out to all who hunger to make a difference in the world and says: "Dare to stir things up. If you seek healing, wade in. Act boldly, from the depths of your being, calling upon the roots of your faith, your cherished traditions, and you will be met." The paradox is that it is up to us and it is not up to us alone. God's grace that has brought us this far will carry us forward to do the work we are called to do.

I have found that it is a question of allowing one's whole self to be in play, engaging with realms one is not fully in charge of, attending to what fires the blood, activates the heart, and furthers the life force. Just as our institutions need to be unleashed, so too must we.

Over a decade ago, while serving as Auburn's executive vice president, I had the persistent sense that there was more I could be doing to help heal the world. I took these stirrings seriously and initiated a series of conversations with women whose leadership I found inspiring. The insights I gleaned, which I lay out in my

book, *God's Troublemakers: How Women of Faith are Changing the World*,¹ unleashed me. A central finding was that these women were leading seamless lives. There was no split between public and private, no compartmentalizing. Exhibiting a remarkable integrity, each woman had gone public with who she was, often inventing an organization which could embody her deepest values and address social justice issues she thought were overlooked. This insistence on seamlessness lay at the root of their courage, effectiveness, and resilience.

One of these women is Sister Helen Prejean, a Catholic nun whose activism was awakened by moving to live among poor people in New Orleans. She became galvanized against the death penalty when she began corresponding with a man on death row and praying with the family of the teenagers he had killed. When I asked her how she gathered herself for the work, she said:

My prayer is a whole way of aligning myself with the energy of God. To me, the big image is energy, movement, a stream. So you put your little boat in the stream. And when you're in the stream and God's love is flowing through you, you can be bold. You just say, for example, "the death penalty is wrong, people are suffering, there's great injustice—I will take it on."²

The alignment she refers to here is another way of naming seamlessness. It is a fluid thing, an ever-evolving balance informed by prayer, a deliberate opening to what lies beyond our current sense of self and world. Both individuals and institutions can do this dance. We just need to keep listening and moving, allowing ourselves to be stirred and morphed into who we next need to be.

Who we next become is of course deeply informed by who we have been and where we have come from. This is another key finding from my conversations with women

¹ Katharine Henderson, *God's Troublemakers: How Women of Faith are Changing the World* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

² Henderson, 112.

leaders. There is no abstract recipe for women's leadership. The forms and emphases it takes arise out of the particulars of each woman's life and the broader context within which she dwells. So too with organizations. With my inauguration as Auburn's president, I have the opportunity to work creatively with the confluence of my own passions and those that Auburn has made manifest for almost two hundred years. Auburn and I, in conversation with the many stakeholders with whom we are linked, are now in transition toward our particular version of seamlessness, giving voice and life to the lessons those inspiring women leaders helped crystallize for me: daring to invent new forms, holding an ethic of relationship and inclusiveness, leading from within, trusting interdependence, and working the links between the personal and systemic spheres. I offer here an account of my relationship to Auburn as a case study, with the hope that it will provide insight to other leaders as they and their institutions evolve together.

Justice in the Blood

The dream of Lela Bloodworth underscores for me that I can't help but do this work because a yearning for justice runs through my blood. It's in my DNA.

I carry with me vivid childhood memories of being in Civil Rights marches with my parents in Louisville, Kentucky in the 1960s. We were moving along in a crowd of mostly black faces. Pressed within that sea of sweaty adult bodies, I felt small and different, a stranger, and self-consciously white, but I also sensed that I was part of something large, something significant. Because our marching was punctuated by prayer and singing hymns, faith became intimately connected to justice, to movement, to doing something with others to make a difference.

My parents were there because of their childhood memories. I still remember the anguish in my father's voice when he told me how, as a youth in rural North Carolina, he saw an African-American man dragged

behind a car in the town square of Wilmington until his body was unrecognizable. Likewise, my mother talked of being awakened as a child by robed Klansmen, on horseback with torches burning, who rode the mile to her home to harass her father for founding the only high school in the region to educate African-Americans.

These memories carried my parents into lifetime commitments as leaders in the community—as bridge-builders and seekers of justice. My father became a beloved professor of Old Testament and Hebrew in a Presbyterian seminary. He made sure I learned my Hebrew alphabet right alongside my ABCs and planted within me deep concerns for Israelis and Palestinians in a conflict that even then was intensifying. When I accompanied him on preaching gigs as a child, it seemed to me that Moses himself would not have been more adored or praised. In our little Presbyterian world, we were royally treated. When I was thirteen, my mother became the first woman elder to be ordained in our church in Louisville. It was a day of anger, tears, and text-citings in our usually orderly congregation. I saw that feminism, though absolutely worth it, came at a cost. It seemed that religious leadership, rightly exercised, mattered a lot.

Right next door lived Ruth and Max Goldberg, who became Aunt Ruth and Uncle Max to me because they treated me as the daughter they never had. They came to church with us on Christmas Eve; I went with them to Friday night Shabbat services. They ate our fried chicken; we ate matzo ball soup and learned to make brisket. Strangers we were by some standards, yet we claimed one another as chosen family—which came with its own kind of risks. On my thirteenth birthday, Aunt Ruth gave me a ruby ring, then over a hundred years old, brought out of Austria during the Holocaust by her courageous parents. She told me its story and asked me to wear it every day. It reminds me that the events of the Holocaust flowed into my bloodline, too.

Auburn's Roots

Auburn, too, has justice in its blood, and a conviction about the role of religion in the public square. From its inception, Auburn has deliberately placed itself on frontiers. It was founded in 1818 in Auburn, New York, then a wilderness area right in the path of revivalist energies sweeping the country. Auburn quickly became known as a seminary that engaged the social issues of the day—poverty, slavery, and women and children's rights.

A century later, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, Auburn was nearly forced to shut down—a parable for many during our own uncertain times. Yet those entrusted with its leadership gradually came upon a new vision with a new form. Auburn ceased to be a traditional seminary that trained and graduated ministers, and positioned itself on a new frontier in New York City, where it pioneered continuing theological education.

In the 1990s, Auburn placed itself on yet another frontier, making a commitment to religious pluralism. Auburn's Center for Multi-faith Education was born to support efforts to do so at several levels: through programs at the grassroots, local community level, including and especially with and for women; through efforts to educate seminary faculty across the nation about reshaping their curricula; and a new Face to Face/Faith to Faith program, which helps teenagers from conflict and post conflict regions internationally—South Africa, Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, and the United States—to become leaders for a new age of interreligious understanding and peace.

The Confluence of Leader and Institution

Today, with my leadership, Auburn is morphing again. Though we are still located in New York City, technology and our global interconnectedness have carried us all into new terrain.

Like the journey of Abraham and Sarah, who were told to leave their father's house and go to a land that God would show them, I believe my journey as president of Auburn (as is true of perhaps all seminary presidents

today), is one of transforming the seminary of my father's generation, so that it may address the challenges of a new age—to seek not just faithfulness in training a new generation of leaders but also relevance in an era when existing institutions may not fit current needs and usual forms of leadership may be insufficient. It is a time when religious pluralism is increasing, demographic trends are changing the face of North America, justice issues press in with urgency, and financial constrictions demand a new way. It is an age when seminaries live between the two poles of secularism and fundamentalisms.

A Fresh Take on Religious Leadership

In the years ahead, Auburn's focus will still be on leadership, but we believe it is time to reconfigure the terms. As we see it, progressive religious leaders need to be purveyors of progressive values, bringing ancient stories to life in compelling ways, interpreting the meaning embedded in current realities. They will need to be both thoughtful and bold, winsomely aggressive in carving out sacred space in the public sphere by asking "Where is God in this?" Where is God in conversations about economic justice, Occupy Wall Street, immigration, human trafficking, LGBTQ equality, gender justice, torture, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the environment, and a woman's right to choose, beginning and end of life decisions, and much more?

We want to help leaders feel confident and called to take part in a public conversation in which CEOs are talking with ethicists, theologians are partnering with activists, and secularists mix it up with devout believers. The work is face to face and online, in a milieu that's local, global, and multi-faith. Face to face in every space.

In the last several years, we at Auburn have thought deeply about the skills and qualities such leaders will need to have. Let me introduce them through the stories of leaders who are already embodying them. These leaders range far beyond our usual notions of ministry. Key to unleashing Auburn's power is the task of

broadening the public imagination about what religious leaders do and who they are.

Consider, for instance, Bishop Minerva Carcaño, the first Hispanic woman to be elected to the episcopacy of the United Methodist Church. She has the courage and ability to go up against Lou Dobbs and win the argument. Immigration is her number one issue. Her pulpit is as likely to be CNN as a sanctuary or classroom. We think religious leaders need to be *media savvy* and that it is particularly important to have women's voices and values heard in the media as well as in the church.

Then there is Julio Medina, who pursued crime and did time in prison. He found God there and went to seminary on the inside, in prison. Now he pursues justice as the founder of Exodus Transitional Community, helping formerly incarcerated people lead meaningful lives after serving their time. He has even been honored at the White House. A religious leader needs to *pursue justice*.

I think of Farah, a young Muslim girl from Columbus, Ohio, who came to Face to Face/Faith to Faith, Auburn's international multi-faith youth leadership program, several summers ago. By her own admission, she was so shy she hesitated to speak. Now she is a counselor for the program and an interfaith leader in Columbus who speaks about growing up Muslim in the United States post 9/11. Surely leaders need the capacity to *build bridges* across divides of many kinds.

Leymah Gwobee is a Methodist woman from Liberia and the main character in the documentary film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. Her activism began with a "crazy dream" about peace! Backed by women in her church and joined by their Muslim sisters, these women began organizing for peace in Liberia during Charles Taylor's dictatorship. They could not watch one more child be mutilated, and they refused to be raped again. So they used what power they had to take action, including sex strikes, denying their men sex until they laid their weapons down. This group of women epitomizes *courage* in the face of conflict—an essential capacity for a

religious leader today. In October 2011, Leymah was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work.

Rabbi Justus Baird directs Auburn's multi-faith programs. He was faced with the decision about whether to accept an invitation to meet with President Mahmoud Amadinijad of Iran. I remember sitting in a staff meeting with him as all of us were discussing our opinions, but what did Justus do? After consulting the people he thought could advise him best, he turned to the Talmud, to his sacred texts, to see what they would tell him about engaging the stranger. Justus was *intellectually rigorous and spiritually grounded*, which is what leaders need to be today.

Then there is Kathy LeMay. Although born to humble circumstances, which included living in her car at times, her family had always given her the message that there was plenty to give. Today, as CEO and founder of her company, Raising Change, she is advising some of the wealthiest people in America about what it means to be generous, to become activist-philanthropists, putting their wealth in service of creating systemic, sustainable social change. Kathy is *wise about money*, as all effective religious leaders need to be.

I first came to know Sharon Brous as a new rabbi just down the street on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. That's before she became famous. Today she is the new face of Jewish leadership in America as the founding rabbi of IKAR, the social justice-based boom congregation, the "it" synagogue in Los Angeles where the young people want to go. Sharon saw a need and, with God's help, created IKAR from scratch, becoming a spiritual entrepreneur. We must add *entrepreneurial* to our list.

Katharine Ragsdale is the newly installed president of Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As new seminary presidents, we share a lot of experiences. But there is one thing she has faced that I didn't have to. When she was seeking ordination as a priest, she came out as a lesbian and was told that there was no place for her in the church. Last fall, she became the first "out" seminary president. When the Church said

to Katharine, “No, you don’t belong in church leadership,” she did not say “no” to the Church. That’s the kind of *resilience* it takes to stay in for the long haul.

If these leadership capacities seem too focused on the individual, perhaps the last is one of the most important: to *live the value of interdependence* by making connections and building communities and movements. A leader is only as good as the networks she is able to build and leverage.

Although we certainly can’t take total credit for their formation, each of these leaders has in some way been touched and shaped by Auburn, and our convictions about leadership have been influenced and inspired by them. Though we think these qualities are vital for all leaders, some are particularly important for women to develop, and some may have special resonance for women.

Women’s Distinctive Leadership Potential

Operationalizing the value of interdependence is a case in point. While writing *God’s Troublemakers*, I became aware of research on women’s leadership that corroborated my own findings about women’s preference for a management style that deliberately draws upon the diverse strengths and insights of others and involves tending a “web of inclusion”³ throughout the organization and beyond. Such organizations tend to be more egalitarian and horizontal rather than hierarchical. When interdependence is truly working, there is not less power, but more, and of a different sort. Power becomes a measure of the healthy functioning of the group, the degree to which its varied gifts are utilized, and the evolution of collective insight into complex issues. This willingness to share power and care for connective tissue is precisely the kind of skill needed to build far-flung

³ See Sally Helgesen, *The Web of Inclusion* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1995) and Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Connective Edge: Leading in an Interdependent World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

networks and communities capable of igniting widespread social change.

Related to this management style is an ability, even a preference, for leading from within a group, or even from behind or beneath. The idea is that often organic, creative movement is best facilitated from somewhere other than on top or out front—“leading without ego,” as some of the leaders I interviewed put it. This skill can be especially effective for facilitating a conversation among people who bring very diverse viewpoints to the table. It requires deep listening, hospitality to otherness, the capacity to hold open a space where common goals may begin to take root, and the humility to recognize that some key pieces of the mystery may still lie beyond anyone’s reach. While this ability may not fit our traditional definition of top-down leadership, it certainly beckons as just the sort of presence so many of our peacemaking efforts and movement building initiatives may well require.

Similarly, women’s relationship to money is a growing resource for leadership. Women control over half of the personal wealth in the United States today,⁴ an underappreciated fact. Also, women are often greater risk takers in terms of their giving. Whereas the philanthropic habits of men often follow traditional lines of giving to alma maters and the arts, women often seed smaller non-profits and justice-related causes, including those that focus on women and girls. This means that strategic philanthropy by women could be the major factor in moving the needle on justice issues in the coming decades. On behalf of this vision, Auburn’s new Generosity and Gender Justice initiative⁵ supports

⁴ See www.pbs.org/ttc/headlines_economics_philanthropy.html. Also see this 2009 article in *Forbes Magazine* by Betsy Brill which discusses women’s wealth and philanthropy: www.forbes.com/2009/08/18/brill-women-philanthropy-intelligent-investing-wealth.html.

⁵ For more on the Generosity and Gender Justice Initiative, see www.auburnseminary.org/womens-multifaith-education?par=20.

women of every economic level as activist philanthropists, helping them to grapple with the challenges, fears, and potential of making money, having/not having money, and giving it away. This initiative is guided by the principle that generosity is defined as a holy way of being in the world that goes beyond acts of kindness to embody a spiritually charged way of living that is generous, generative, and inclusive. Such generosity lies in every one of us. It can flourish, in ways that have often been overlooked and underused, to change the world.

As we know, just as women have been marginalized in the corporate world, so too are women disproportionately underrepresented in top religious leadership positions in congregations. Currently, I am the only woman president of a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seminary. This ongoing obstacle means that the entrepreneurial skills that women have—the fierceness to make a way out of no way, fueled by a passion for life to flourish—are a crucial means for bringing women's values to bear on public issues. Just think what might happen if this entrepreneurial fierceness were fully unleashed!

My research for *God's Troublemakers* revealed that the entry point for each woman's work on broad public issues was most often a single charged personal encounter with brokenness or injustice which had so caught her attention that she could not turn away. Her response in the moment was correspondingly intimate and personal—like buying peanut butter and bread for a room full of hungry children—but the encounter became an unforgettable window on broader social patterns which called her into action. She may not have thought of herself as a policy analyst or a social change agent or spiritual entrepreneur before the encounter, but she became one afterwards. For many women, justice is compellingly understood as right relationship writ large.

Underlying all of Auburn's women's programming is the conviction that women have a distinctive and absolutely necessary role to play in healing the world.

Research has demonstrated that when the women in a society achieve greater equality in such areas as education, business, and civic engagement, the well-being of the entire community is lifted up.⁶ There is growing recognition that empowering women is key to realizing justice in a broader framework.

Going Public

We are now in the midst of transforming Auburn into a laboratory where the key leadership qualities we have identified can be experienced, experimented with, and honed by both men and women. Our growing edge is to do whatever it takes to bring progressive religious values into the public realm. In keeping with the ethic of seamlessness I mentioned at the outset, we feel it is essential that Auburn operate in such a way that it models the values it seeks to teach. This means that Auburn itself will be developing its own public presence as it simultaneously supports individuals in becoming more visible themselves. It means that I and Auburn staff must pivot and expand our capacities and repertoire for leadership. Organizationally and individually, I and we must strive to embody the leadership qualities we espouse.

To fully unleash our power, we must commit ourselves to bridging the gap between theory and practice, between theology and social action. We want to be a think tank that operationalizes itself—a think/act tank—a creative laboratory for informed committed action, a place where education and doing are always in dynamic interplay in service of right relationship and the flourishing of all life.

This commitment means we will remain open to programmatic, organizational, and staffing changes we can make to continuously live this dream forward.

⁶ For a global view, see The World Development Report 2012 focused on Gender Equality and Development on the World Bank's website.

Although we are very much in process, my hope is that Auburn can become an organizational model for how to transform an institution focused on learning and research into one that includes practice, action, and movement building. Here are some glimpses of how that is already happening.

Tapping the Resources of Auburn Media

Ten years ago, when we were acutely aware of the absence of progressive religious voices in the public square, we took the first steps toward forming what is now Auburn Media—a full-featured resource center for the interface between the world of religion and the secular media. Since then, we have trained over two thousand religious leaders so that they can speak to a broad range of public issues using the traditional media of radio and television, as well as new media and social networking tools.

We've also developed Auburn Media into a resource for journalists seeking to cover religion more accurately and engagingly. We have discovered that journalists actually want to talk to religious leaders and clergy. They are hungry for moral voices that help make sense out of current realities. To ensure that public debate is informed by diverse perspectives, we connect journalists with responsible religious voices and experts from across the country.

Spurred by Auburn Media, I too am honing media skills, as a blogger on the *Washington Post* "On Faith" blog and as a spokesperson on a range of public issues. Being out there in public in a credible way takes an enormous amount of time. It means being willing to be consciously and openly religious, using religious narrative and sacred text, in ways that progressives often shy away from. It means finding a language of moral valance that translates well across a broad audience. It means being the curators and purveyors of story and narrative, an art at which women often excel. While the public is often numbed by abstract policy discussions or a barrage of statistics,

we find that personal stories that illuminate public issues can move heart and mind and change behavior.

Time for Movement Building

Groundswell

We will continue to build upon Auburn Media's resources, but it is already serving as a fertile seedbed for further public initiatives. Chief among them is a major new commitment to building movements for change. The signs of our times—the Great Recession, demographic change, regime changes and public uprisings in the United States and across the globe, the emerging energy of the millennial generation—indicate that the time is ripe for an upsurge of collective action. We witnessed the potential for such a movement during the election of President Barack Obama, which brought a swell of hope and united people across racial, religious, cultural, and political spectrums. Since then, however, a rising sense of disillusionment around economic inequalities and political partisanship confirm for many that we need more than a president, more than regime change, to ignite sustainable change. We need a new venue for social action, organized not around a political party, a particular tradition, or a single issue, but around hope that a shared vision for a better world can become reality.

In response, Auburn has launched a multi-faith social justice initiative called “Groundswell.” Our goal is to create an action network that is progressive, pragmatic, and post-partisan, galvanizing people around shared values rather than dogmatic truth claims. Designed as a “progressive plus”⁷ movement, Groundswell will rally

⁷ Groundswell includes progressives plus others who share such values as bridge building and border crossing (reaching out to and trying to understand our neighbors and even our enemies), truth telling (listening deeply and giving voice through sacred text and contemporary conversation), hope and humility, tradition and innovation, and celebration in the small steps that carry us forward even in the face of great challenges.

people who are hungry to enact justice in a fallen broken world. By cultivating connections between social justice organizations whose work has often been separate and siloed, and deploying innovative social media tools, Groundswell will generate moral force around social justice issues by bringing together the secular, the seeking, and people of faith in bold collective action.⁸

One of our initial campaigns is calling forth a “groundswell of responsibility” on one of the most troubling and hidden moral issues in America, the sex trafficking of children. Groundswell is currently leading a diverse multi-faith movement to educate and bring awareness to this issue. Our strategy has been to gather a broad multi-faith clergy coalition of signers to a full page ad in the *New York Times* requesting Village Voice Media to shut down its Adult Section, which provides a platform where others can advertise minors to be trafficked for sex. Signers are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and humanists, joining together to pursue justice. They represent the end goal of all interfaith work—not merely generating dialogue and cozy feelings about one’s neighbor, but taking collective action to heal and repair the world.

Going public as a seminary is a counterintuitive act. This campaign has demanded not only that that I and other Auburn staff handle media effectively, but that we train our allies and clergy signers to do so as well. It has joined us in partnerships with secular NGOs and advocates across religious and theological differences. This kind of advocacy, education, and engagement means that we must not only be informed about institutional risk, but also comfortable taking the risks that such engagement demands. Most recently, it has meant using our convening power for a meeting between Village

⁸ See John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2011): 36–41. The authors describe collective impact as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving specific social problem.”

Voice Media and Auburn's clergy coalition. As president and host, my role was to create a holding environment for people who would not otherwise meet to have conversations they would not otherwise have about very different perspectives on how to address the trafficking of children.

To work on an issue like child sex trafficking calls forth in me many of the leadership capacities we have identified for religious leaders generally: being spiritually grounded, pursuing justice, being courageous in the face of conflict, practicing the discipline of being media savvy, and nurturing resilience.

Prophets/Profits for Peace

A second movement-building initiative that exemplifies a more public role is Prophets/Profits for Peace. It builds on Auburn's longstanding concern for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and focuses on multi-faith relationships between and among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Prophets/Profits for Peace uses financial investment as leverage for strengthening the economy of the West Bank for an eventual Palestinian state. It is based on the premise that investment is a more positive and effective means of bringing about peace than divestment, a strategy for change that some within mainline Protestant denominations invoke as a means to "end the Occupation."

With hope in short supply in the Middle East, Profits/Prophets for Peace (PFP), provides an opportunity for institutional and personal investors to do something right now that can improve the prospects for a two-state solution to the conflict. To be sure, political negotiations are essential, as are people-to-people programs, like Auburn's Face to Face/Faith to Faith program for youth. But we believe that economic leverage is a powerful yet often overlooked dimension of peacemaking. By strengthening the economy of the West Bank through capital investment and supporting enterprises where Israelis and Palestinians are working

together for mutual benefit, we believe we can increase the viability and capacity of a future Palestinian state in a negotiated two-state solution, nurturing “stakeholders for peace” who are quite literally invested in such a future. In the process, we can rally a diverse coalition of investors—Christians, Jews, and Muslims—who may disagree on politics, but are committed to working across ideological, religious, and political lines to set the stage for a sustainable peace. We are convinced that this approach is not only possible, but the most faithful and effective means of promoting a just, prosperous, and lasting peace for all.

As with the Campaign for Responsibility, focused on child sex trafficking, PFP involves galvanizing unusual partners and allies around shared goals and values—in this case, peace in the Middle East. True to our conviction that religious leaders need to be wise about money, PFP takes Auburn and me as a woman president into the realm of finance and investment, learning the art of a financial “deal” that focuses on a double bottom line, that is, potential financial gain plus social good flowing from the formation of relationships among unlikely partners: Jews, Christians, and Muslims all across theological spectrums. It provides a way for finance and legal professionals who are lay leaders from synagogues, churches, and mosques, to use their professional skills for faith-based justice and peace work. It demands that I as president use the convening power of Auburn, set the vision for the project, learn the very public and political issues around this particular conflict, and use religion as a resource for making peace, not waging war. It provides a broad spectrum of people the opportunity to learn the art of peacemaking, to act together instead of fighting each other. It is the highest form of lay and clergy education and requires ongoing learning by all of us.

Ironically, though women make some of the best peacemakers, I am often one of the very few women at the table in this work, which is also true at diplomatic and negotiating tables more broadly. One of my goals is to bring more women to the PFP work even as we provide

an unusual vehicle for men to exercise their leadership as peacemakers.

As a seminary dedicated to healing the world, our strategic goals revolve around where we want to see the needle move around public issues like child sex trafficking, Israeli-Palestinian Peace, LGBTQ equality, or economic justice. Then it's a question of discerning who the right partners and allies are, signaling our interest to them, and engaging them in setting goals and aligned actions. What Auburn brings to the table may change from campaign to campaign. Sometimes we take the lead and sometimes we play a supporting role. We may offer concept and vision, or media training for all players, or fundraising, or the use of new media and technology.

In an interdependent world, we don't have to do it all, but we do want to give it our all. For us, this means continuing to embody those leadership capacities we feel are key to our times: pursuing justice, bridging divides, being spiritually grounded, intellectually rigorous, entrepreneurial, wise about money, resilient, and courageous in the face of conflict. It is, finally, a question of fulfilling our vocation, asking concurrently and continuously, "Where is God in this?" "How can Auburn be bold?" "To what end and purpose?"

Leadership Lessons

Exercising the Bully Pulpit

All of this emphasis on going public is changing my role as seminary president. I am no longer just the key promoter of the institution *qua* institution but the vessel by which Auburn uses its bully pulpit to promote and advocate for particular values in the public square. I have learned to get up to speed quickly on public issues such as child sex trafficking, but I also remind myself that I do not have to be the expert. What I must be sure to do is contribute what is often missing: a moral perspective. In a world where many issues are framed solely in financial, legal, and practical terms, offering the modern day equivalent of a parable, as Jesus did, allows listeners to

reframe accepted notions, to gain insight in a “still more excellent way.”

Metabolizing Conflict Sustainably

Taking an institution public—being more visible and vocal—means taking risks. It involves taking negative hits on the internet and from those who may have liked you better the old way. As we go up against secular corporate powers and principalities or those who espouse narrow ideologies, I am drawn out of my comfort zone and into realms where courage and media savvy are essential.

There is a gender component to this work as well. One must be fierce to speak truth to power, but it must be done with presence so as not to be discredited as female hysteria. I also realize that many of my male colleagues seem to respond instinctively to public conflict, as if it is blood sport, with an emphasis on the sport. As a female of a certain age, I metabolize conflict differently—it registers in the body and psyche differently. I am most effective when I put the emphasis on the blood, calling up the dream of my fierce reformer matriarchs in dreadlocks and war paint. The way I marshal the necessary presence and resilience is to know with my whole being that much more than a game is at stake.

Being a Leadership Laboratory

My colleagues and I think that Auburn’s training of public religious leaders can only have integrity if we are also learning and living it ourselves. We are working to embody the leadership qualities we feel are essential, individually and as an institution. Rather than setting the tone from the top—the usual corporate model—we have put in motion an iterative, organic process whereby the institution develops new capacities through successive acts of creation, conscious and unconscious, intentional and serendipitous. We are simultaneously doing and watching, refining our practice as we go. By modeling what it means to go public as a religious institution, we

are able to bring tested, up-to-date experience to those we educate.

With this much institutional change, the radar is on all the time. I have created a cabinet for strategic change with senior level staff to monitor our capacity and set benchmarks for success. I use the board very actively as strategic partners. Many board members are involved in Groundswell and Prophets/Profits for Peace as generative thought partners, advocates, and institutional caretakers, watching out for Auburn's institutional interests.

I also consult an executive coach and organizational change expert who knows me and the institution well, including the board and senior staff. She has seen me lead in various settings, internal and external to the institution, and helps me benchmark success, strategize, and monitor progress. I chose this particular companion on the journey because she is a feminist theorist who has helped to build the Jewish social justice movement with an emphasis on women's leadership. Her expertise and experience map onto my own: gender, faith, and social justice. Because she is a woman who has seen gender dynamics play out in many organizations, she is a great listener and guide. She also offers a place of rest—as someone who is for “me,” who helps me discern what my “highest and best use” is in a given situation, and who speaks the truth with kindness, not judgment.

Tuning to the Jazz of Interdependence

Auburn's structure has become flatter and less hierarchical. Instead of a leaders with discreet roles and purviews siloed from one another in discreet centers, we now have pods, as we call them, which coalesce fluidly to work together on initiatives as need arises. Staff members still function as educators who direct programs as educators, but simultaneously they may be operating in fast-moving “campaign” mode. This means that my role as president shifts as well. I am no longer conducting an orchestra with a prescribed set of instrumentalists and a score to follow. It is more like leading a jazz ensemble

and trusting not only the musicians but also the power of the process itself. “A jazz ensemble...is a model of a diverse group coming together sometimes in a ‘chaotic, turbulent environment, making fast, irreversible decisions, highly interdependent on one another to interpret equivocal information, dedicated to innovation’ and the creation of a novel, transformed result.”⁹ This leadership mode requires entrepreneurial ability, nimbleness, flexibility, and the ability to play different roles at different times. There is space for individuals to shine as stars but always the requirement that they play well with others. It is about calling forth the talents and providing a holding environment where there is structure and challenge but also nurture.

Beyond the Usual Talent Pools

The seminary as movement builder must reach well beyond usual talent pools to include those from other professional cohorts. We feel we need to be a more complex ecosystem internally in order to interface more effectively with the interconnected complexity all around us. In addition to the traditional skill sets of theologically trained educators and administrators, we have sought out people with media and movement building expertise. Auburn has recently hired Isaac Luria, a millennial, who brings skills for building social change campaigns and who can grow small databases into large ones as he did previously for a political lobby group. Susan Reed, former editor-in-chief of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, brings thirty years of experience in print media and public relations to help an obscure seminary become more visible and enhance visibility for the social change initiatives with which Auburn aligns itself.

⁹Beth Zemsky and David Mann, “Building Organizations in a Movement Moment,” in *Social Policy* (Spring–Summer 2008): 16.

Caring for Coalitions

In our experience, collective impact thinking is less about focusing on Auburn as an isolated player and more about the partners, allies, and players we can bring into our own constellation or with whom we may associate in theirs. It is about discerning where the power and energy is, valuing a diversity of strengths, and sensing how their confluence will allow us to be more effective than any of us could be alone. In this more permeable mode, one's own well-being becomes intermingled with that of the whole. I am as territorial and fierce about my own institution as anybody, yet I find this self-interest becomes tempered by a larger vision of the whole and by caring for the coalition to which one is committed. Having collective impact means actually living the value of interdependence, becoming a potent part of the beloved community to heal and repair the world.

The goals we strive for are not solely about unleashing Auburn's potential but are much more broad: moving the needle toward more inclusive justice and promoting religion as a force for good in the world.

A Little Bit Swerved

It is no longer common practice to spend a career in one place. Financial and political vagaries, whether corporate or non-profit, make it a risky business to give one's professional life (and heart!), to an institution that can spit one out to balance a budget or to maintain the status quo. And yet I find myself as president following much the same path as my father did at the seminary in Kentucky to which he gave almost the entire sum of his professional life. I guess that sustained commitment is in my blood too, because Auburn has captivated my imagination for almost twenty years. In several roles and now three years into the presidency, it remains infinitely fascinating, constantly morphing to meet the needs of the times, yet steadied and grounded by almost two hundred years of history and theology—a theology which, even in Auburn's early years, was deemed “a little bit swerved” by

a visiting student from Princeton Seminary. Perhaps I can be most true to the spirit of my father's work and to my own vocation by taking Auburn to a place that honors my "father's seminary" by going beyond it—just as he did in his time. I am able to do this, in part, by invoking the encouragement of the cloud of witnesses—from ancestors appearing in dreams in war paint and dreadlocks, to our collective forebears who faithfully worked for justice, to contemporaries who are my partners, allies and friends. I cannot imagine a more creative and fulfilling role than to join my one "wild and precious life" as Mary Oliver would say, to Auburn's and, with partners within and beyond, to "trouble the waters and heal the world" by God's abundant and ever surprising grace.