

## Workshop Leader, Leah Gunning Francis, Ph.D



Dr. Leah Gunning Francis is the Associate Dean of Contextual Education at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. A frequent guest lecturer, preacher, and workshop facilitator, she draws on her marketing experience, pastoral leadership and academic training to creatively equip students, clergy and congregations for transformative social action.

Dr. Gunning Francis is the author of a forthcoming book on clergy involvement in the aftermath of Michael Brown's death in Ferguson, Missouri, titled *Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community*.

*Ferguson and Faith* is a collection of stories of courage and hope. Dr. Gunning Francis gleaned from these stories seeds of possibilities that, if nurtured, could serve us well into the future. These are the stories that were rarely imaged on television, yet they are integral to the fight for justice in Ferguson and resonate with the struggle for human dignity around the country.

In 2012, Dr. Gunning Francis was awarded the prestigious Engaged Scholars Fellowship to study issues of risk among middle-class African American young men. She argues that the meta-narrative about young black men makes all of them "at risk," regardless of socioeconomic class, and utilizes the narrated experiences of black mothers to construct a new narrative about young black males that promotes wholeness and well-being.

Dr. Gunning Francis' additional research interests focus on transformative education as reflected in her doctoral dissertation, *Beyond "Band-Aids" and Bootstraps: Toward a Womanist Vision of Christian Education as Social Transformation*. Her writing reflects her commitment to the spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of women, men and children; and highlights her particular interest in underserved and minority communities.

Dr. Gunning Francis has served as an adjunct professor for the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, and has provided pastoral leadership for congregations in Georgia, Illinois and Ohio. She also has served as a guest lecturer, preacher, and workshop facilitator for a variety of institutions and congregations around the country. She has received numerous awards to include the Candler School of Theology's G. Ray Jordan award for excellence in integrating academic study with constructive leadership and service, and the Fund for Theological Education's Doctoral Fellow Award.

Dr. Gunning Francis earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Marketing from Hampton University; a Master of Divinity degree from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University; and a Doctor of Philosophy degree from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois.

A native of Willingboro, New Jersey, Dr. Gunning Francis is married to Rev. Rodney Francis, Senior Pastor of Washington Tabernacle Baptist Church. They live in St. Louis, Missouri with their elementary school aged sons, Evan and Desmond.

## Workshop Leader, Leon Sharpe

Leon Sharpe is founder and principal of The *Praxis* Group, a strategic consulting firm that specializes in fostering social innovation, building empowered communities, and advancing institutional change. Additionally, he is senior consultant to Focus Leadership St. Louis, a social policy advocacy program that convenes executives from all sectors to promote regional collaboration. He has spent many years as a professional trainer and educator and is currently adjunct professor in the Department of Communications and Journalism at Webster University where he teaches courses that examine the role of film and other media in establishing and reinforcing patterns of social power.



He is the co-author of *Media Messages: What Television, Film, and Popular Music Teach Us About Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*. Leon is a native St. Louisian and an active member of Christ the King United Church of Christ in Florissant, MO. He currently serves on the board of directors of Neighborhood Houses, The Ethics Project, and the Griot Museum of African American History & Culture.

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## Bible Study Leaders, Rev. Dr. Michael H. Bone & Rev. Dr. Vernon Percy Howard, Jr.

Rev. Dr. Michael H. Bone has served as Sr. Pastor of Zion United Church of Christ in Union, MO, since 2009. Prior to that he served UCC churches in Colorado and New Hampshire. Originally a Southern Baptist pastor, Rev. Bone left the SBC in 1995. He found a warm home in the UCC while pursuing an advanced degree in theology at Boston University and within a few years of graduating found himself back in the ministry and reclaiming his pastoral call.



A life-long learner, Mike is usually seen carrying a book bag and heard (at quite a distance) laughing and singing. When not preparing for worship or visiting members of the congregation, Mike enjoys going for walks with his wife, Billie, and playing board games with his daughters who live in Webster Groves. His current focus is on centering prayer and what it means to be the church.

## Bible Study Leaders, Rev. Dr. Michael H. Bone & Rev. Dr. Vernon Percy Howard, Jr.

Dr. Vernon Percy Howard, Jr. is faith and spiritual leader currently based here in the Midwest having pastored, preached, and led communities of faith in Arizona and Missouri with over 20 years of experience leading, revitalizing and empowering congregations.

A prophetic voice for peace, justice, and love who has trumpeted the Divine paths of God for the human family delivering speeches and messages that reflect the higher and more noble hopes for nations, societies, cultures, and communities

An activist and community organizer in solidarity with the poor, the disenfranchised, the afflicted, the suffering, and the oppressed. Most recently he collaborated with other committed grassroots persons to re-birth in KCMO the Poor Peoples Campaign, launched but never fulfilled by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1968.

A scholar and teacher having taught at the University of Arizona, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, and William Jewell College in the areas of African American Culture, Politics, and Religion. He holds a Bachelor's Degree, a Master's Degree, and a Doctoral Degree from Virginia Union University.

Most recently, in May of this year, he led more than 300 grassroots demonstrators from across the state of Missouri in a civil disobedience action which shut down the Missouri Senate in protest of the State's refusal to expand Medicaid and ensure the basic human right of health care for every individual. As a result he was a guest on MSNBC's "The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell", carrying the agenda and concerns of poor, oppressed, and disenfranchised people to over 1 million viewers across the country.

He is the author of two books which are available tonight, one most recently titled "Leadership Against the Odds: Inspiring, Forging, and Succeeding Through Adversity"

As President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City he is helping to organize and lead a grassroots effort to raise the city's minimum wage to a livable standard that will bring hope and relief for the working poor in the urban core across the city.

He resides in the Kansas City, MO area, his native region, and currently serves as the Senior Pastor of the Historic St. Mark's Union Church. He also serves as President and CEO of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City.

**NOTE: Bible Study will be presented on Friday, June 5 and Saturday, June 6, at 8:30 am in Windsor IV.**

