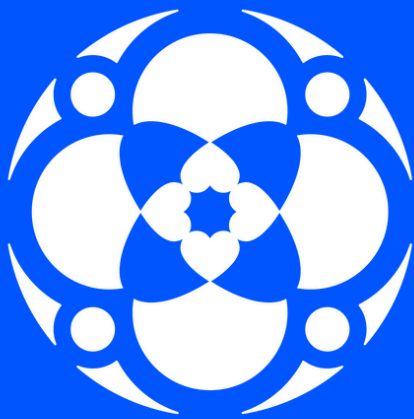


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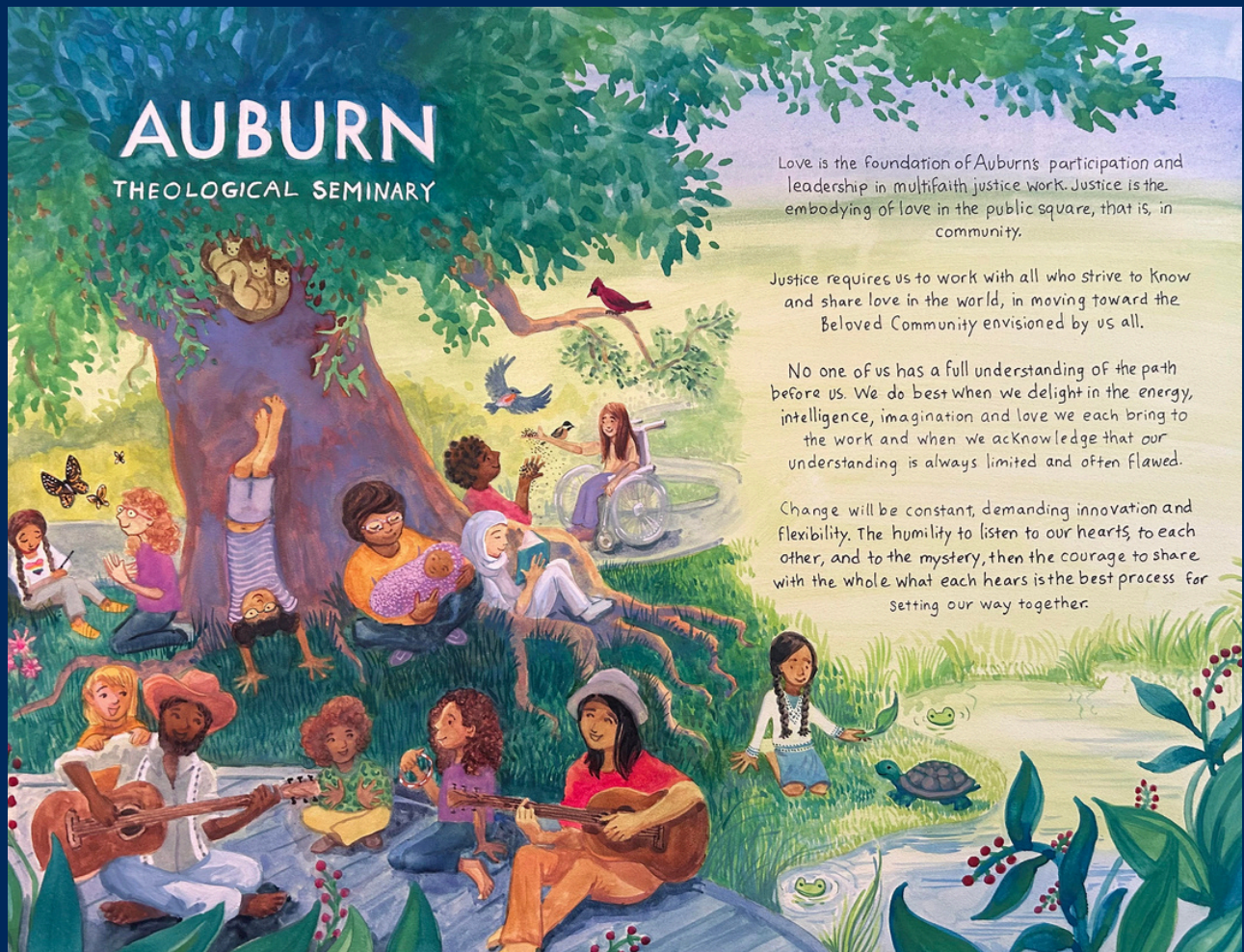
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Auburn  
Theological  
Seminary  
*lead with love*

24

# Lead with Love Building a Legacy, Embracing the Future



Love is the foundation of Auburn's participation and leadership in multifaith justice work. Justice is the embodying of love in the public square, that is, in community.

Justice requires us to work with all who strive to know and share love in the world, in moving toward the Beloved Community envisioned by us all.

No one of us has a full understanding of the path before us. We do best when we delight in the energy, intelligence, imagination and love we each bring to the work and when we acknowledge that our understanding is always limited and often flawed.

Change will be constant, demanding innovation and flexibility. The humility to listen to our hearts, to each other, and to the mystery, then the courage to share with the whole what each hears is the best process for setting our way together.





# Lead with Love 10 Generations

Dear Friends,

Hope abounds. Still. The story of who we can be is still being written.

Though 2024 has been a year of seismic socio-political shifts, Auburn Theological Seminary is bringing ten generations of experience and perspective to bear on what it means to lead through change. With the theme of “Heal the World,” Auburn began the year leaning in with curiosity, humility, self-reflection, and the resolve to encourage a multigenerational commitment to reckoning with, imagining, and building a healed future.

In this annual report, I am excited to share with you a snapshot of the work launched in 2024 to write new stories of thriving, hope, healing, and love, and to send those stories as letters to the future.

How big is your imagination for a healed future?

I have been imagining a future where all could, as the songs of my faith say, “sit at welcome tables” since I was a little girl. This is intentional work that does not end on Friday at 5pm. It is joy and it is a way of life, even for an institution.

As the Auburn team welcomed the third cohort of Emerging Leaders in October, I greeted them with words that I want to share with you:

“We are not seeking to transform the world through performative charisma. We are investing in leaders whose visions are bigger than oppositional politics....

“We can follow the historical lines of genocide, slavery, wars, and hydra-headed-isms to roots watered by visions of human hierarchy, visions of inequitable human worth. Healing requires new stories that inspire us to build what can be – a world worthy of all our children. This work requires that we lead from our hope, not our wounds. It is what it means to lead with love.”

Sending strength for today and bright hopes for tomorrow,

**Rev. Dr. Emma Jordan-Simpson**  
President

**Rev. Patrick B. Reyes, Ph.D.**  
Dean



# Lead with Love Auburn's Team



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Reyes, PhD, Dean



Rev. Dr. Shannon  
Daley-Harris,  
Associate Dean



Malcolm Ezennia,  
Director of  
Finance



Rev. Dr. Emma  
Jordan-Simpson,  
President



Elsie Barnhart,  
Program Manager



Erica Littlewolf,  
Director of  
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Narrative Change



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# In Memorium

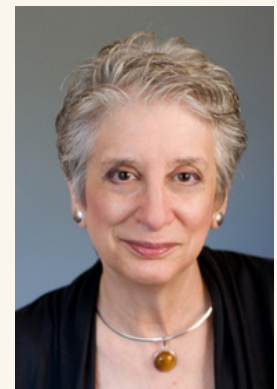
## Barbara G. Wheeler

### 1945-2024

Barbara Wheeler was the first woman president of Auburn, serving from 1979 until 2009. She embodied the spirit and legacy of Auburn. Her work across theological education, through her founding of Auburn's Center for the Study of Theological Education (CSTE) in 1991 and its journal *Auburn Studies*, helped leaders see a shifting landscape in the field. President Wheeler was, and her reports continue to be, the most trusted voice in the field whether addressing leadership transitions or changing demographics of the student body.

She was committed to advancing the work within the Presbyterian Church (USA) for LGBTQIA+ persons, women, and racial and ethnic minorities, serving on national boards and in her local congregation. From publishing to leadership development, President Wheeler cared deeply about the direction and shape of the church. She dedicated her time and service to helping the church become a more just and loving institution. Barbara was a beloved colleague and mentor to many across both the church and theological education. She will be missed by us at Auburn and the many people who were loved and supported by her.

*"Barbara's love for God's grace was evident in her actions, helping position Auburn at the forefront of theological education within the denomination and beyond. Upon shaking my hand at my graduation, she remarked, 'I am certainly glad one of my last duties as president is to hand you this award. We can't wait to see the fruits of your ministry.' That personal vote of confidence laid the groundwork for Auburn's commitment to fostering and celebrating emerging leadership. Thank you, Barbara Wheeler, for your leadership and service. May your memory always be a blessing."* – Rev. Dr. Derrick McQueen, Board Chair, Auburn Theological Seminary





# Lead with Love

## Programs that Heal the World





# Emerging Leaders Healing the World





# Participants in 2024



Auburn received **169** applications from a national pool of Emerging Leaders (ages 18-35) who are leading their communities beyond the tactics of oppositional politics. In keeping with recent research on effective ways to counter bias and promote religious pluralism, we curated cohorts for a broad range of perspectives, ideologies, religious traditions, and identities. Auburn accepted 54 leaders into the 2024 Pilot Emerging Leaders Program through three in-person contact and skills-based cohort immersions (two in New York and one in Washington, DC). The pilot will be expanded in 2025 to a year-long experience with two multifaith, cross-cultural, and diverse cohorts of emerging faith-rooted leaders between the ages of 18 and 35 who are grounded, equipped, and connected to build community, bridge divides, and pursue justice through storytelling and narrative change as healing-centered leaders in their contexts.



# What Participants **Said**



*I've been so grateful to be able to have that space this week with all of these amazing people. It's been a gift, really....I mean, you can't heal the world unless you have a vision for what a healed world could look like. And to me, it is a multicultural world. It's a world where everybody is so steeped and rooted in their own tradition, and in their culture, and their community, and able to then bring those gifts to connect with others."*

Liz, a Jewish nonprofit leader



*These small, intentional discussions helped me connect deeply with other participants and gain insights into diverse perspectives. The simulations were also incredibly valuable, providing practical, hands-on learning experiences that allowed me to apply theoretical concepts in real time. I appreciated the free time as it offered space for reflection and personal growth. These elements combined to create a well-rounded program that nurtured both leadership skills and personal development.*

Ali S., a Muslim graduate student



*I feel as though having completed this program, I have a better sense of how I'm going to utilize these technologies, balancing both the scholarship and the practices into an integrated approach to bridge those divides and build community and draw those interlinkages and those connections in my context.*

George, a Christian doctoral student



# Center for Storytelling and Narrative Change





# Stories to Heal the World

Religions and spiritualities have given us great gifts and inflicted great harms. Engaging that truth is not just about understanding our past: it is also about claiming responsibility for a thriving future for all. To that end, Auburn's Center for Storytelling and Narrative Change launched with a large consultation from May 30 - June 1, 2024, with 34 participants, including Black, Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, and storytellers with disabilities from diverse faith communities and non-profits across the country. The goals of this convening were to:

- Develop and share narratives to address the complex theological roots of injustice and build religious narratives that lift the common good
- Provide resources for religious and faith leaders to engage in intergenerational narrative change that centers hope and proclaims a future story of wholeness

This consultation with faith leaders, non-profit leaders, and religious professionals provided invaluable insight for the future of the program.







# What Participants Said



*Within my small group, I was awestruck at the descriptors of the future shared, particularly those shared by the millennial and generation GenZers. As I began to reflect on the brilliance of their writing, I thought about my place in the work as a mid- to late-career scholar as I engage this future focused work. I am becoming an elder and moving toward becoming a good ancestor.*

Center for Storytelling & Narrative Change Consultation Participant



*The gathering brought together a diverse group of individuals working to utilize the power of storytelling to create change in their communities. Through the power of sharing - telling, and listening- change in how we see each other and our interconnections and interdependence can be fostered. We had individuals working in a variety of settings and with a variety of groups of people. The gathering allowed for sharing that enhanced the possibilities imagined before the gathering and allowed for connections with otherwise unlikely partners in creating change in each of our communities.*

Center for Storytelling & Narrative Change Consultation Participant



Author Kaitlin Curtice offered one of two presentations during the gathering.

*This much-needed space allowed us to think about the state of our earth, our relationships with others and the earth, and how those relationships could evolve over time. We thought about how the work that we are invested in would change the trajectory of those relationships. I got to hear that most creatives and scholars choose to be optimistic about that future. We got to knead through our collective ponderings with Cole Arthur Riley, which was a highlight for me. After that gathering, I walked away with connections whom I have already begun cultivating after that circle was dispersed. It was incredible and I hope it's not the last time we come together.*

Center for Storytelling & Narrative Change Consultation Participant



# Dean's Lectures in 2024

To understand the ongoing violence and trauma from conflicts across the globe, Auburn Theological Seminary created partnerships with those engaged in the long work of “healing the world.” Healing-centered leaders came alongside us for a learning and equipping journey through the inaugural Heal the World Dean’s Lectures. Religious and faith leaders challenged all to see their own potential as healers in their contexts. The series included three core lectures and storytelling presentations.



Over 185 leaders  
attended our  
Inaugural Dean’s  
Lectures





# The Dean's Lectures are possible through the generosity of:

George Family Foundation  
Henry Luce Foundation  
Anonymous  
Kim Anderson  
John Ankele  
Jennifer Jones Austin  
Mary Byron  
Rev. Dr. Janet Edwards  
Ellen Wingard  
Frank Yamada

# We thank all our early supporters of the Center for Storytelling and Narrative Change for their participation in the Dean's Lectures:

Rev. Jim Abbott  
Macky Alston  
Fahmee Al-Uqdah  
Kim Anderson  
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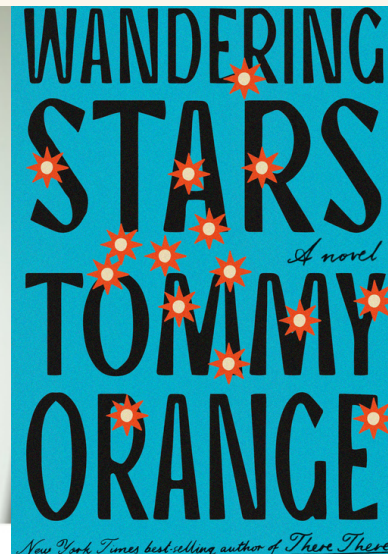
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## 2025 Featured Speaker



Tommy Orange  
PHOTO CREDIT: Michael Heston



Pulitzer Prize finalist and bestselling author Tommy Orange  
February 20, 2025





# Relaunch of Auburn Studies and Center for Research

Auburn relaunched the Center for Research with the completion of our first study on executive turnover in theological and religious institutions. Of the nearly 270 institutions that provide graduate level training or certificate programs, over 600 CEOs and Chief Academic Officers (Deans) have turned over in less than a decade; most of these transitioned roles in the last four years. Auburn looked at past studies and conducted interviews with those who transitioned out of these roles to better understand what is taking place in religious leadership development. That report was presented to executives of these schools in December and will be released this year.

The research was conducted by the Very Rev. Michael DeLashmutt, Ph.D. (pictured right), the former Interim President and Dean of General Theological Seminary.

Go to [Auburnseminary.org/research](https://Auburnseminary.org/research) to find the latest study there!





# Celebrating the Work Inspiring Progress

---

↑ **Selected 54  
of 169  
Applications**

Emerging Leaders

↑ **Selected 34 of  
71  
Applications**

Center for Storytelling and Narrative  
Change participants

↑ **63 %**  
Women

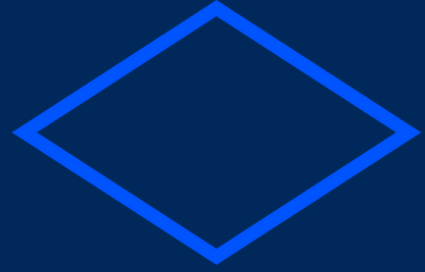
↑ **342  
audience**

# of in-person participants reached

↑ **67 %**  
of participants in Auburn's  
programs represented  
racial or ethnic diversities.

↑ **195k**  
Reads of the Letters to  
the Future

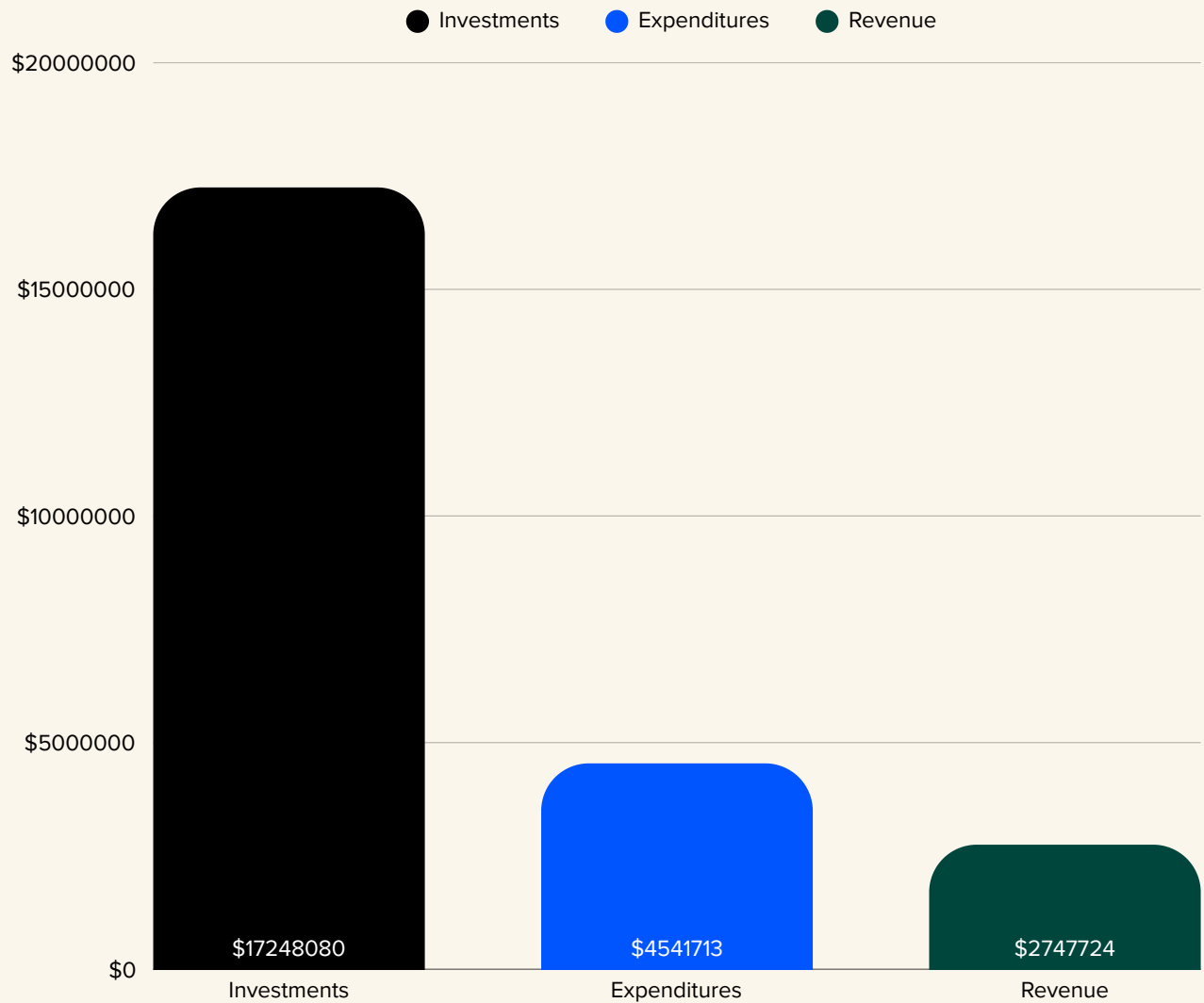
# Lead with Love Support that Helps Heal the World





# FY 2023-2024

## Dashboard





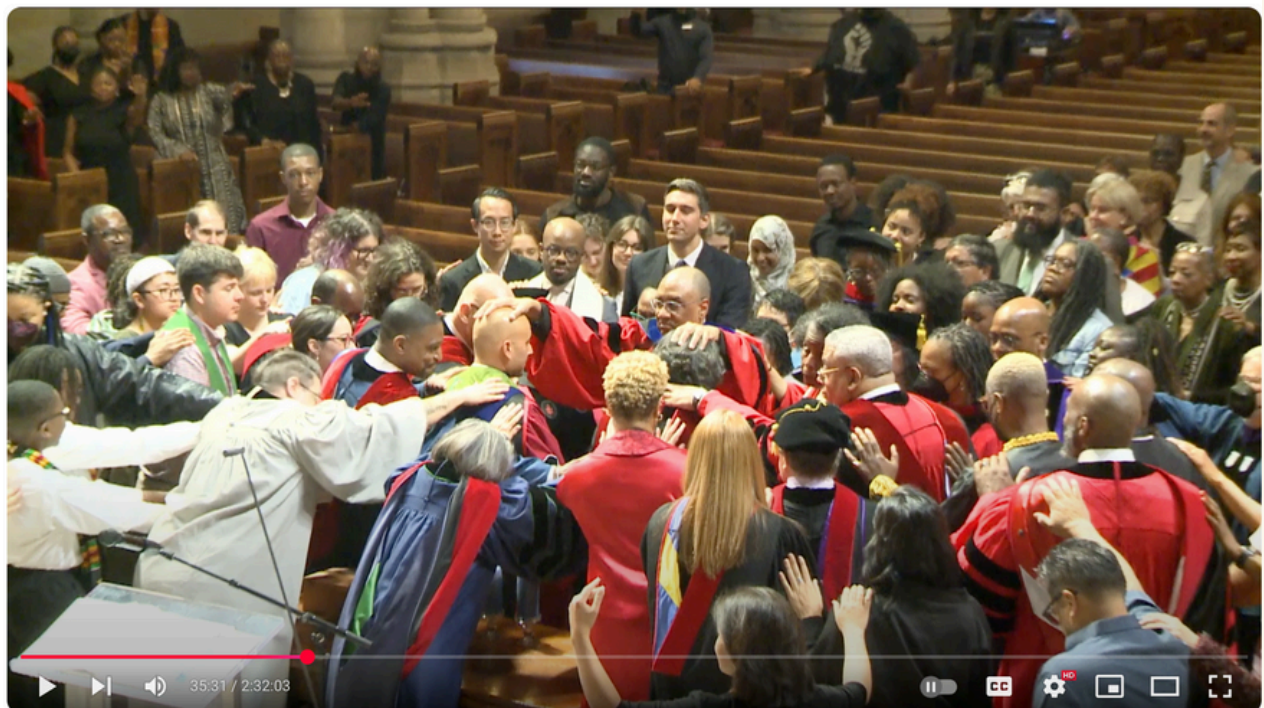


# Gratitude, Collaboration, and Continued Success

We express our sincere appreciation to all our funder-partners for their unwavering support and dedication.

We thank all those who joined us for the Installation of Auburn's new leadership, President Rev. Dr. Emma Jordan-Simpson and Dean Rev. Dr. Patrick B. Reyes, in June at Riverside Church. Watch the service with remarks from Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson, CEO and President of Children's Defense Fund, on our Youtube channel.

Sharing "Letters to the Future" written by the Center for Storytelling and Narrative Change consultation members during this ceremony demonstrated the power of public letters from those who envision a world healed by joy. You can watch this Installation Ceremony on our website or on Auburn's YouTube channel!



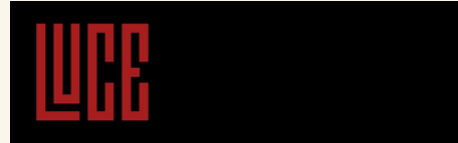
Installation service for Rev Dr Emma Jordan Simpson and Rev Dr Patrick B Reyes



# We thank all our funders for their generous support:



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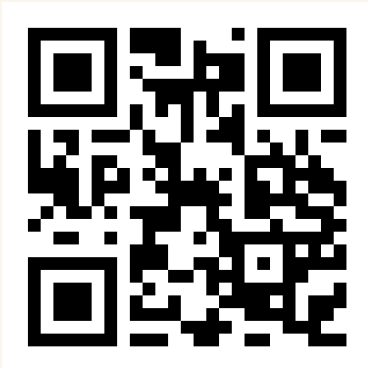
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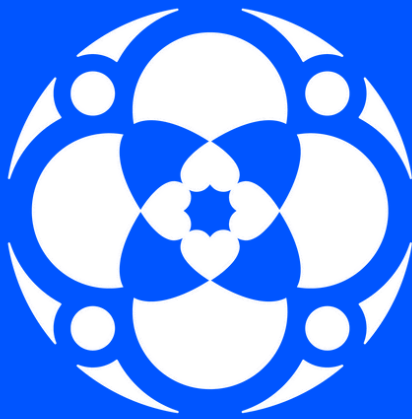
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How big is your  
imagination  
for a healed future?









# Auburn Theological Seminary

*lead with love*

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