

2025

YOUNG LEADERS TO KNOW

By Devita Parnell

Each year the CBF Ministries Council recognizes 25 Young Leaders to Know as part of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's ongoing investment in young Baptists. This year features graduate students and seminarians, continuing their education for ministry and church work.

Young Leaders are an integral part of the wide network that makes up our Fellowship. They are deeply engaged in CBF churches and with CBF ministry partners. As we continually seek the future of CBF, their voices are integral to our continued mission of renewing God's world. They know that the church will look different post COVID-19, and are excited to refocus on the things that matter, while embracing new technology and modes of gathering. While many are called to congregational ministry, others seek the future of ministering in new and unique ways. To them, Bold Faith requires action. It means speaking truth to power, pursuing justice even when it is uncomfortable, and stepping out without understanding—trusting in the Holy Spirit.

We are excited to introduce to you the 2020 Young Leaders to Know from across our Fellowship.

WESTON HENDERSON



Winston-Salem,
North Carolina

Wake Forest
University Divinity
School, Pursuing
M.Div.

Knollwood
Baptist Church,
Winston-Salem, N.C.

What does bold faith look like to you? I think that bold faith is having the ability to say that you do not know. Often times that can be interpreted as weak faith. The willingness to admit what we do not know confronts the reality that God and God's work is more complex than our imagination and human understanding. Bold faith should bring more questions than answers. Bold faith explores curiosities and celebrates the evolution of our faith formation. When we walk through each day, we lean closely on what we do know about God. We find assurance and peace with a God that loves us beyond all imagination and a God that weeps with us in the trying times.

To what kind of ministry/vocation do you feel called?

Vocation is the alignment of the skills that God has given with interest/needs and opportunity. I do not think of vocation as a long-term plan. Right now, I believe that my vocation is to be a student at Wake Forest University. I have given much thought into the areas of teaching at both the collegiate and high school levels. I could also see myself serving in a congregational setting as a minister. Ministry is a profession that is rapidly changing. I could see a combination of these two passions in my future.

If you were to give a TEDTalk, what would be the topic? I have done research in the sociology of American religion, more specifically in the changes that are taking place in Protestant churches. The role of the Church and society is changing. I could talk about some of the things that I see as helpful for the Church and its ministries.

How do you think COVID-19 will reshape the Church?

Christianity became what it is today because of its response to crises of this type. The Early Church dealt with plagues in the Roman empire. The survival rate of Christians was much greater than that of pagans because Christians helped others, and many pagans converted to Christianity. The work of Christian charities in the 3rd century led to its rise. The Church has faced decline in enrollment and participation for the last 75 years. While our numbers may not rise following this pandemic, COVID-19 is an opportunity for us to respond and grow in other ways. The role of the Church should always be directed toward evangelism. We can spread the Gospel through acts of compassion, caring for those who need it the most.