



FOREWORD by  
PARKER J. PALMER

# Another Way

LIVING & LEADING  
CHANGE *on* PURPOSE

Stephen Lewis • Matthew Wesley Williams • Dori Grinenko Baker

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**chalice  
press**

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*This book is dedicated to...  
a new generation of people who refuse to accept things as they are  
as all that there is—the dreamers, freedom fighters, artists, and  
warrior-healers who pursue another way.*

All that you touch  
You Change.

All that you Change  
Changes you.

The only lasting truth  
is Change.

God  
is Change.

— Octavia Butler  
from *Parable of the Sower*

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# Foreword

It's a privilege to invite you into a book written by three people I respect and admire, a book that comes from their experience leading the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE) that does healing work in a wounded world. If that kind of work is on your agenda, you'll find this book a vital resource.

By happy accident, the path that led to this book began, in part, on the back porch of my home. Ten years ago, two of the three authors—Stephen Lewis and Matthew Williams—reached out to me for a conversation around shared concerns and visions. We spent a day with each other and a few close colleagues engaged in what the third author, Dori Baker, has described as “a lingering, sacred conversation that was in many ways the beginning of the journey described here.”

A decade later, it's joy for me to introduce a book that contains a rich mix of personal stories, inspiring visions, challenging ideas, and practical methods for creating “safe space” for vocational discernment and sustenance among people of faith who want to lead change “in embedded systems of power and privilege.” Equally important, FTE devotes itself to making sure that people without power and privilege not only have access to those spaces but feel deeply at home in them.

In the field of personal and social transformation, it's hard to find a subject more important than the one explored in this book. The spaces in which we gather are increasingly unsafe for deep and true speaking and listening, unsafe for the soul, as I suggested in lines I wrote fifteen years ago:

We know how to create spaces that invite the *intellect* to show up, analyzing reality, parsing logic and arguing its case: such spaces can be found...in universities. We know how to create spaces that invite the *emotions* into play, reacting to injury, expressing anger and celebrating joy: they can be found in therapy groups. We know how to create spaces that invite the *will* to emerge, consolidating energy and effort on behalf of a common task: they can be found in task forces and committees. We certainly know how to create spaces that invite the *ego* to

put in an appearance, polishing its image, protecting its turf and demanding its rights: they can be found wherever we go! But we know very little about creating spaces that invite the *soul* to make itself known.<sup>1</sup>

In the absence of “soul spaces,” we have little chance to show up for each other with what theologian Howard Thurman called “the sound of the genuine” in each of us.<sup>2</sup> When that sound is lacking, we will never hear the music of personal and social change.

As the authors explain in detail, *Another Way: Living and Leading Change On Purpose* centers on a set of practices set forth through the acronym CARE. These practices attend to four fundamentals that are often neglected, even in spaces formally designated as “spiritual” or “religious”:

C = Create hospitable space

A = Ask self-awakening questions

R = Reflect theologically together

E = Enact the next most faithful step

There’s much to be said about the first three steps, and the authors say it here, clearly and well, offering commentaries and tools that give readers good guidance on what it would look like to take these steps in their own settings. They do the same with step number four. But because that step is the one that makes the CARE process different from group explorations that never find expression in grounded action, I want to say a few words about it.

In my experience, “enacting the next most faithful step” begins in the moment when you hear your soul’s imperatives with a clarity that’s beyond doubt. In that moment, you know intuitively that if you ignore or defy your soul, you do so at the risk of undermining your own identity and integrity. The dearth of CARE-type spaces in our society is driven by fear—the fear that if we were to listen closely to the truth within us, we would be called into the deep discomfort and hard work of personal and social transformation.

Here’s an example of what I mean. Using methods similar to the CARE approach, I once facilitated a retreat for twenty-five physicians. In the middle of a challenging exploration of death and dying, one

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<sup>1</sup>Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 56.

<sup>2</sup>Howard Thurman, “The Sound of the Genuine” (Baccalaureate address, Spelman College, Atlanta, May 4, 1980). Speech edited by Jo Moore Stewart for *The Spelman Messenger* 96, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 2–3. The entire speech can be accessed here: [www.uindy.edu/eip/files/reflection4.pdf](http://www.uindy.edu/eip/files/reflection4.pdf).



physician said, “I work in a system that has me right on the edge of violating my Hippocratic Oath several times a week.” As the others in the circle absorbed his words in silence, he spoke again: “You know, that’s the first time I’ve ever said that to a group of fellow physicians.” After more silence, this man spoke once more, this time from an even deeper and quieter place: “The truth is, that’s the first time I’ve said that to myself.”

When I heard his final statement, I realized that my physician friend was now on the horns of a dilemma. He had heard “the sound of the genuine” from the depths of his soul. Would he try to sweep under the rug what he’d heard, leaving him feeling alienated from himself? Or, when he left this safe space and went back to work, would he act on what he’d heard from within, manifesting his integrity in action?

This man opted for the latter. On returning to his workplace, using community-building tools he picked up at the retreat, he gathered a few colleagues who shared his dilemma, and together they created a penalty-free zone for the reporting of medical errors. It’s the absence of such zones and the data they provide for systemic change that makes hospitalization the third leading cause of death in the U. S.

Though my story is not strictly a CARE story, it illustrates the power of circles that are safe for the soul to trigger moments of truth that—carefully nurtured and strategically pursued—can lead to organizational as well as personal transformation.

One of the most impressive features of *Another Way: Living and Leading Change On Purpose* is that the authors use their own organization as a case study in both the need and the potential for this kind of root-level change. Chapter 8, “Embodying Care,” includes these words:

In 2012, the Fund for Theological Education<sup>3</sup> saw a crisis coming as it inched towards its sixtieth anniversary. In our own sphere, we recognized a drastic misalignment between our stated values and where our resources were deployed.

When you pick up a book about personal and social transformation and find that the writers use their own organization—and their own roles in that organization—to illustrate the honesty, the risks, and the struggles that transformation requires, you know you’re holding a book you can trust. This is such a book.

— Parker J. Palmer

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<sup>3</sup>The Fund for Theological Education was the original name of what is now the Forum for Theological Exploration.

# Introduction

## **There's Gotta Be Another Way: Why CARE?**

We three—Matthew, Stephen, and Dori—begin our time together in silence. Over the telephone, an expansive silence invites us to breathe, collect our scattered souls, and show up to each other in this moment, although we are five hundred miles apart.

Matthew ends the silence with “Thank you all.” Stephen says, “I’d like to read something,” and follows with these words of Howard Thurman: “We do not know each other yet. We have not dared to be silent together.”<sup>1</sup>

So begins the practice, once again, of centering ourselves before stepping into a future that asks something of us.

This book is written by three people with very different backgrounds who share a common yearning and a common experience. The three of us yearn for a future in which all humans flourish and contribute to the earth’s healing. We’ve experienced small spaces in which cocreating such a future seems possible, probable, and even surprisingly likely. These spaces begin with silence, slowing down, and remembering to be human.

*Another Way: Living and Leading Change on Purpose* centers on a group of practices we call CARE. CARE is an acronym for an approach that invites people to engage wholeheartedly in ways of leading profound change, ways that are deeply connected to people’s inner well-being and to their communities of accountability. CARE consists of four adaptable moves. When creatively contextualized in a variety of settings, these moves allow people to find another way to lead and a deeper capacity to facilitate change in themselves, their communities, and the world.

We’ve seen this effect take hold in a crowded hotel ballroom among hundreds of activists, in a lecture hall filled with burned-out

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<sup>1</sup>Howard Thurman, *The Inward Journey* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1961), 52–53.

power brokers, among board members of a nonprofit organization, in weekend retreats at woody church camps, and in seminary classrooms steeped in the assumptions of academia.

We've witnessed the results of CARE in young adults launching social enterprises to address eco-justice, CEOs who decide to invest resources in alternatives to the status quo, and change-makers who find the courage to approach difficult work in ways that align their passion, principles, and practices.

People who experience CARE-infused leadership sink into their honest selves and experience a mysterious relatedness among strangers. They come up out of a session led with CARE principles feeling changed, empowered, and able to take a next step. It is an effect at once deeply familiar and countercultural. It has a stickiness that reverberates in the communities to which people return. When we see it happening, we are reminded that people are built to experience community, to find joy in one another, and to create a better world out of a deep reservoir where the soul resides.

When people first begin to practice another way, it can seem like driving on a dirt road instead of a paved highway. But once leaders begin to use the CARE

*People who experience CARE-infused leadership sink into their honest selves.*

practices regularly, they invariably begin to wonder how they ever led without them. We hear them remark on the results they see and on the joy they experience when they leave a gathering, believing again that they can change social structures that diminish human flourishing.

## What Is CARE?

CARE grows out of our work at the Forum for Theological Exploration (FTE), a leadership incubator for the church and academy, at which Stephen Lewis is president, Matthew Wesley Williams is vice-president, and Dori Baker is senior fellow.

At FTE, we gather, convene, design, invite, create, explore, and play at the intersection of faith, leadership, vocational discernment, and social change. During the past sixty-five years, FTE has worked with more than six thousand young leaders discerning ways to make a difference in their communities through leadership in higher education, faith communities, and other public institutions. During the past fifteen years, we have worked with more than five hundred organizations and their leaders. These organizations are ones that intentionally accompany young leaders in their exploration and pursuit of lives of meaning and purpose or build capacity to lead positive change in their institutional context. In the last several years, FTE paid close attention to the needs

of more than 1,200 diverse young leaders primarily between the ages of twenty and thirty called to serve as pastors, activists, and scholars, as well as to institutions that support, call, and hire them to lead.

We have discovered several noteworthy insights about the practice of leadership, the formation of leaders, and organizations' efforts to develop, hire, and retain the next generation of leaders. One important insight that is emerging from FTE's work with leaders and organizations is this: current practices are too individualistic and short-sighted. Organizations want better solutions to their leadership development and change-management challenges, but too many don't have enough time, the right personnel, or enough bandwidth to create and sustain meaningful change in their context. Individual leaders want to make a positive difference in their communities, institutions, and the broader world. However, they either don't know how to do so in meaningful ways or they don't fully understand that lasting, positive change requires collective and coordinated efforts of a team or community of leaders—not the lone efforts and aspirations of an individual.

These insights reflect a core corrective to established leadership norms. Instead of defaulting to the cult of individualism, we remind each other: If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

CARE is an acronym that spells out another way to live and lead change. It is an approach that helps us remember that people (and their ideas) are more powerful when they travel through periods of change together. It is a framework for how people can commit more fully to changing things they care about deeply in themselves, their communities, organizations, and the world.

As Parker Palmer indicated in the Foreword, the acronym goes like this:

**C** = Create hospitable space

**A** = Ask self-awakening questions

**R** = Reflect theologically together

**E** = Enact the next most faithful step

In the pages that follow, we will introduce CARE and tell stories of people and organizations who have found these practices useful, even life changing.

We didn't invent the CARE practices. They aren't new. They come to us through many traditions, ancient and modern. They are fundamental to what it means to be human and to move through life together toward an uncertain future.

Again and again, we have synthesized, borrowed, and played with these practices among many diverse groups of people, some of whom identify as Christians, and others who eschew that label or what it has come to connote in twenty-first-century North America.

Over the years, this immersion took us to a small Presbyterian church in Greenville, South Carolina; a community center in Berkeley, California; a back porch in Madison, Wisconsin; and many other places across North America. On a deck overlooking the San Diego harbor, we decided to share what we've been learning about another way to lead, and to use this book to create a wider conversation about how people live and lead change on purpose. We invest a double meaning in the words "change on purpose," pointing both to change that is intentional and change that helps individuals and communities discover their "why"—the deep purpose of their existence. We use the acronym CARE, because "to care" is to attend deeply to one another's well-being. For us, the church exists to care, to lead lasting change for the good of all people, or else it loses its reason to be.

Though we three are grounded in the church, we recognize that many people experience "church" and "Christian" as largely negative, self-serving, or dehumanizing. Indeed, we also struggle daily with problematic portions of Christian tradition that we reject. CARE draws on forgotten roots of Christian faith and practice that are useful and necessary at this point in human history.<sup>2</sup> These roots hold particular promise for the development of leaders who work both inside and beyond the church and who want to be able to address the difficult issues confronting people, communities, organizations, and the world.

## Who We Are

We are a team of two African American men and one white woman with a long history of wondering and struggling together over how our individual stories, vocational journeys, and hoped-for futures converge in the telling of this story. At times we will speak as a "we," but at other times as individuals. We recognize that varied opinions and divergent

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<sup>2</sup>For more on this see: Peter Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995); Barbara Holmes, *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), and *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017); Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2019) and *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (New York: Crossroad, 2009); Fabien Eboussi Boulata, *Christianity without Fetishes: An African Critique and Recapture of Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984); Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols and Images of Interpretation in Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Marimba Ani, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1994).

viewpoints exist among the three of us, opinions and viewpoints that we need not attempt to reconcile, for this multiplicity is a strength borne of diverse worldviews, bodies, and experiences. We begin by introducing you to the parts of our individual journeys that prepared us for the work we do together through FTE, in hopes that you too will recognize the multiplicity of experience your team brings to your particular work.

**Matthew writes:**

I was born on the South Side of Chicago in the late 1970s to parents active in the church and in justice organizations working on issues related to poverty, equity, racism, and human freedom. Early on, my parents helped me to understand that service, protest, and organizing for change in the world are all expressions of active faith. They steeped me in the cultural and spiritual gifts of African-descended peoples and taught me how to drink from those rich ancestral wells. In so doing, they instilled in me a spiritual orientation that sees the inner life and the social world as two interdependent aspects of one and the same reality. For me, faith-rooted leadership is about social change, and change is rooted in the inner life. While I am the child of Reginald and Marcelle Williams, I am also the child of a long tradition of faithful women and men whose lives bore and bear witness to the fact that there is no task more sacred than the liberation of oppressed peoples. I accepted my call to ministry in this tradition at the young age of fifteen.

As a child, I witnessed my father's devotional practices and discovered my own in his library at home. The view out of that room was partially blocked by the red brick side of our neighbor's house, but it cleared the alleyway beyond that wall just enough to allow a shaft of occasional Chicago sunlight to illuminate my father's bookshelves. I would often stand in front of that endless wall of books and stare at the bindings. I would pull a few down at a time to allow them to talk to one another. Zora Neale Hurston, Tom Skinner, Linda James Myers, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others spoke to me of my rich spiritual and intellectual lineage of love, faith, and struggle. This was the tradition to which I belonged, to which I would be accountable. I was blessed to be exposed at an early age to the life of the mind as a necessary element of Christian faith, human development, and the struggle for freedom, justice, and equity.

In that space, in conversation with those voices, I was learning how to practice being still, quieting my mind, talking to God, studying Scripture and history, and listening for the leading impulse of Spirit and my ancestors. These and other practices filled me with a sense of

wonder and imagination and inspired me to believe that the wiles of evil systems would not have the last word—and that another world is possible. This was the contemplative space in which I began to discern my vocation.

I can see now that as I moved further through college, seminary, and into the public role of preaching and congregational leadership through my late teens and early twenties, I slowly began to lose touch with those contemplative practices and community rituals that had so filled my inner well. Prayer, meditation, and Scripture study too often became nothing more than performative tools I used to meet the endless demands of life in ministry.

After multiple bouts of leadership burnout by age thirty, I noticed that I was living out of a warrior-hero model of leadership that called for me to sacrifice my physical and mental well-being to serve the sacred needs of the community and the cause. My heroic self-understanding as a leader contributed to my cycle of burnout: organizations, such as churches, schools, and justice agencies that claim to be about the business of human flourishing, often devour people in the process of trying to increase social good.

People, their well-being and wholeness, take a backseat to the “good” mission for which the organization exists. People, like interchangeable parts, are treated as a means to an end. Organizations tend to consume their leaders. Often subtly and unknowingly, those same leaders then sabotage the work of the organization. A deep dissonance often emerges between the way we work and the values embedded in the aims for which we struggle. The apparent message here is that our work requires of us a kind of fractured life, and this causes both the people and the collective mission to suffer. Our models of leadership and the methods by which we build and mobilize community conspire to drain the very life out of our leaders and the communities they serve, and thereby reinforce the death-dealing, soul-destroying realities we say we want to change.

For decades, I had a nagging sense that there’s got to be another way to lead. With urgency, I began to explore ways to be in community with people who are seeking to live faithfully and meaningfully. It is that other way that I’m pursuing.

### **Stephen writes:**

Born and raised in Charlotte, North Carolina, I grew up in an African American missionary Baptist church, where I was well acquainted with the idea that God has a purpose for everyone. As a six-year-old, I was drawn to myths and stories about healing and transformation. Some

of this was directly connected to my prayers that God would heal my mother, who suffered from depression. But a lot of it was simply a natural curiosity I had about human quests and spiritual encounters, which seemed to be at the center of all these stories. Only years later, after a first career in finance, did I find myself returning to these stories, realizing they lie at the center of what matters most to me.

As a young professional, I found myself listening to the stories of colleagues as we traveled up and down sixty floors of a Charlotte skyscraper or waited at the busy intersection of Trade and Tryon Streets. I heard secret confessions of hopeful aspirations, dreams deferred, success followed by burnout, and the aching desire for something more than a career, money, and status. Despite working hard for these very things, once we got them, we all wanted more. The “more” we desired was to be better stewards of the one life entrusted to us. We wanted more meaning. We wanted more purpose.

Every day of all those years on my way to work I passed by the invisible people barely living in the shadows of Charlotte’s booming financial district. Each day as I trekked the four blocks from the parking lot to my office, I wondered about God’s purpose for the marginalized, forgotten, and abandoned. I wondered why Black and Brown people experienced deep faith and meaningful worship but lacked access to the kind of socio-political and economic power once leveraged by African-American church leaders and allies to improve the conditions of their community and city. I wondered why there appeared to be so much inequity in God’s provision for Black and Brown people around the world. I began asking: What is the role of religion and religious institutions, particularly the church, in addressing the social conditions of marginalized people? How are they called to help develop solutions to address societal evils and injustices? What is their role in transforming communities and society?

Over a lunchtime Bible study that I organized and led in the basement of nearby First Presbyterian Church, more of these questions emerged in the stories of twenty fellow sojourners searching for more in their lives. And gradually I felt a rumbling inside, inviting me to deeper questions about the meaning and purpose of my own life.

When I shared with my pastor my decision to pursue a call and attend seminary, he suggested I “be open.” Those words unlocked doors.

*What is the role of religion and religious institutions, particularly the church, in addressing the social conditions of marginalized people?*



They invited me to dive into the deeper truth of what mattered—what I cared deeply about—in my own life. I discovered there was something more to life than climbing the corporate ladder, making money, getting married, having kids, growing old, and then dying.

I came to believe that there is a future that mourns if we don't step forward courageously and use our lives on behalf of the greater good. For me that meant committing to shaping and advancing a different kind of religion. The word *religion* comes from the Latin *religare*, which means to reconnect. I have become committed to the forms of religion that rejoin and connect us to a profound wisdom. This kind of religion honors the unity of life that is deep within us and between us, a unity that transcends us, guides us, and even conspires with us to work on behalf of creating a better world. This led me to the work of inspiring and developing the next generation of faith leaders who will help shape a more hopeful future in which all people can live a life of meaning, dignity, and worth.

My collaborative friendship with Matthew began over a meal in suburban Atlanta in 2000. It became wildly fruitful during the fortunate circumstance of shared office space at FTE. Within these four walls near the campus of

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if we don't step forward  
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Emory University, we began to imagine a series of “what ifs”: What if we helped people better align their espoused values with their leadership practices? What if we explored alternative ways of leading, ways that value collective wisdom and action? What might be possible if change-making leaders gain the tools to imagine and enact alternatives to the status quo?

The list went on.

What if we encourage young leaders to cultivate their inner life as a key discipline?

What if we invite young leaders of color into deep self-reflection—not alone, but with others, and in spaces that privilege trust and interdependence?

What if we explore together the steps that courageous change requires of us?

What if we could create opportunities for people to explore their call beyond the four walls of a church?

Those questions led us on a search for resources, specifically practices and processes that could help us to cultivate a different way of leading change. Among the many resources was the Center for Courage & Renewal founded by Parker J. Palmer, whose work helps people discover

and sustain the deep connection between who they are and what they do in the world. In the work of the center we recognized some clues to an alternative. Both of us became facilitators of the center's processes and found numerous ways to begin to apply its practices, which are designed to help people align their soul and their role.

Our shared office became an incubator for new ideas and practices. Our exploration led us next door, into the office of our colleague Elizabeth Mitchell-Clement, whose bookshelf and brilliance exposed us to a world of ideas and frameworks. She challenged us to take seriously the instincts, intuitions, and intellectual urgings that were driving our desire to cocreate alternatives to the dominant models of leadership. At Elizabeth's urging, Dori's story-based method of theological reflection on vocation entered our work.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of these connections, into FTE's day-to-day life began to seep group practices of building trust, creating circles of deep listening, asking reflective questions, and using silence, writings, and reflections from authors to evoke shared truth. We created "Project Rising Sun," a two-year leadership academy for young pastors of color interested in learning how to lead change. This became the early laboratory in which the CARE practices first flourished.

### **Dori writes:**

I grew up in rural Florida, where my exposure to religion was Sunday morning visits to Southern Baptist churches with my girlfriends, all of us still groggy after mostly sleepless sleepovers. There, I heard about a God who planned his Son's life, death, and resurrection to save me. That never made any sense to me, but I was drawn to the story of an ancient wanderer, a man who spent a lot of time outdoors feeding and healing people. I also sensed belonging to something bigger than myself. My father, the son of Ukrainian immigrants, took me to midnight vigils at the Russian Orthodox church, which I remember as a blur of men in robes speaking a language I did not understand. Between the rule-based rigidity of the Southern Baptists and the incense-filled mysticism of Russian Orthodoxy, a deep curiosity about God began to form in me.

Questions about the connection between spirituality and justice slammed me during college as I trained to be a journalist. One winter, I covered a hard frost that ruined the local strawberry crop in the community in which I grew up. I noticed that beneath the diminished profits of wealthy (mostly white Baptist) farmowners hid a more devastating story—the situation of seasonal farmworker families (mostly of Mexican descent), whose very livelihoods depended upon

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<sup>3</sup>Dori Grinenko Baker, *Doing Girlfriend Theology: God-Talk with Young Women* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

the strawberry crop. I became acutely aware of the distance between my wealthiest and my poorest neighbors, and I became aware of the racial bias embedded in this reality. As the then-critical world of journalism continued to expose gaps in the religious worldview in which I swam, my curiosity about God grew more urgent. I left Florida to go to seminary in Chicago, not because I wanted to be a pastor—back then I didn't know female pastors existed—but rather to figure out for myself how God fit into the world of chaos, pain, and structural injustice that journalism revealed to me.

Seminary became a journey of scraping away at a pervasive image of God as an all-knowing white male obsessed with rules. Slowly, I came to recognize God as a mysterious life-force who answers to many names, always escapes description, and, more than anything, can be trusted as a compassionate presence in the midst of suffering and the seeming absence of hope. Along the way, I joined a local United Methodist church (UMC) that was living on the radical fringe of that denomination in the late 1980s. It was a nuclear-free zone making safe space for Central American refugees, welcoming queer and transgender folk, and advocating for the ordination and marriage of gays and lesbians. Here, in the presence of women mentors, I began to envision myself as a pastor and prepared for ordination.

A deep immersion in the writings of women and particularly women of color saved my life. In my last semester of seminary, I experienced an onset of unprecedented anxiety. Over a distinct three-day period, I became profoundly aware of the church as intricately entwined with racism and patriarchy. I found myself wondering if I could remain a Christian. Bereft of faith, I felt foolish for all the time and money I had spent in seminary. In this bleak midwinter, two images comforted me. The first was a tiny spark deep within me that I sensed was connected to the source of the universe. This faint glimmer of hope was reminiscent of the “divine spark” of which the Quaker tradition speaks. Accompanying this spark were the strains of spirituals, songs passed down by enslaved people. Having studied the spirituals in seminary, I knew that these songs interpreted the biblical story in a way that countered the dominating culture of their day. They took the very narrative white slaveholders twisted to condone slavery and turned it into life-giving sustenance for a people to rise up and seek freedom in the face of great danger.<sup>4</sup> The songs bounced around my brain, my heart, my spirit. Mingling with the inner spark, they worked a small miracle: on the fourth day, I got up out of bed, puzzled but grateful for what seemed like a mystical encounter. I rejoined my

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<sup>4</sup>See Yolanda C. Smith, *Reclaiming the Spirituals: New Possibilities for African American Christian Education* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004).

former self, knowing my next step was to pursue ordination so that I could take part in reforming a tradition from within. A year later Bishop Leontine Kelly, the first African American female bishop in United Methodism, laid her hands on my shoulders to ordain me into the priesthood.

Six months into my first parish, I found church leadership to be soul-shrinking. Busy weeks filled with night after night of meetings, ego-driven committee members, and the corporate mandate to grow, grow, grow at all costs. In an effort to heal myself, I sought more embodied ways of leading, one of which included wilderness treks to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. There for a brief two weeks each summer, I experienced another way, one in which we lived in community, preparing meals, hearing stories around the campfire, and contemplating the sun's daily path across the sky. These practices reminded me that church once revolved around nature's rhythms, rituals of care, and time spent hosting one another's humanity.

I found my vocation to be bridge building between the dying white institutions of Christendom and the liberating theologies emerging from scholars of color such as Katie Cannon, Kwok Pui-Lan, and Ada María Isasi-Díaz. Translating these theologies into the lived realities of contemporary girls and women became the focus of my first book.

*Church once revolved around nature's rhythms, rituals of care, and time spent hosting one another's humanity.*

I came to FTE in 2008, drawn by my work with youth and young adults around the practices of shared storytelling, deep listening, and reflecting together on meaning and purpose. I began to work with Matthew, Stephen, and other colleagues on a series of events called "Notice, Name, and Nurture" to support congregations in attending to the leadership potential of young people. These carefully invited, multiracial gatherings gave birth to temporary congregations who reveled in the diversity often lacking in their home congregations. Leaders reported back to us that practices they encountered at Notice, Name, and Nurture inspired them to change the way they began board meetings, led intergenerational fellowship, and nurtured volunteers engaged in organizing to improve their neighborhoods.

### **Matthew, Stephen, and Dori write:**

Late one night, we walked through a makeshift gallery hung with colorful, three-dimensional depictions of the future that was emerging

through the participants. We saw green spaces where people of all ages tended a garden; tables where plentiful food was shared among all; neighborhoods where expanded networks helped care for young and old. We heard ourselves saying “This stuff works. It really works!”

Matthew and Stephen began inviting the entire FTE staff into their shared history of experimentation and synthesis, action, learning, and reflection. We began thinking together about how to scale these practices for a wider audience. Along the way, we also began to use the practices to transform the very organization within which we were working.

Together, we’ve shared meals at the end of long days of learning, when we are miles from our homes. We’ve struggled deep into a conversation and resurfaced hours later, recommitted to articulating nuance, instead of settling for assumptions about one another’s meanings. And we’ve debriefed the results of our collective efforts, sometimes bearing witness to failure, but often acknowledging those spectacular moments when grace sweeps in and uses one of us as a vessel of her larger purpose. We are not afraid of disagreeing and pushing one another toward greater clarity. We bring a sense of playfulness and joy to our collegiality.

Now we invite you to join us. Bring your authentic self into experimentation with these practices. Invite others into conversation about deep longings for a more hope-filled future. By engaging this work, you embody a response to the collective feeling that “There’s got to be a better way to create a future that we all long to see.”

## Why CARE?

Why CARE?

Because there’s got to be a better way of leading.

Social change is not merely a game of trade-offs in which we sacrifice personal and communal well-being for the pursuit of shared ideals. We need not live divided, believing a better world is possible while daily resigning ourselves to reproducing social realities we say we don’t want.

We are not doomed to remain in leadership loops that rely on the illusion that all we need to achieve our aims is that one special person to take us to the promised land. We need not follow leaders who envision and embody their vocation only as heroes, martyrs, and saviors, and inevitably fall into predictable patterns of burnout.

Because there *is* another way.

Institutions and organizations *can* learn to respond courageously to the increasingly complex challenges facing the communities they serve. Young people growing up in these communities *can* find ways

to make a difference with their lives. Organizations *can* find ways to reimagine their role in cultivating the kind of leaders we need now.

People are not the means to the ends in social change. Human beings are the ends. The well-being of all creation is the end. There *is* a better way of leading. We've seen it. We experience it. And it never ceases to amaze us.

CARE is an invigorating intervention. It invites us to reimagine how we engage in change at personal, organizational, and communal levels by revisiting our understanding of leadership and purpose. Purpose is inextricably tied to the enterprise of leadership. In fact, it is the seedbed from which leadership springs. What might be different if we began to explore these fundamental notions out of a new framework?

We are not the first to call into question dominant modes of thinking and talking about leadership and vocation. We are part of a great cloud of witnesses who believe there is another way.

We hope that this book pushes further conversation and action among people who, like us, believe that people's lives depend on us enacting alternatives. We invite you to imagine what practices of leadership look like when vocation is something that emerges not simply from individual soul-searching but from the shared soul of CARE-full community discernment.

*We are part of a great cloud of witnesses who believe there is another way.*

## Why CARE Works

The CARE practices work because people are hungry to make a difference in the world. The hundreds of young adults we gather each year tell us over and over again that they long to discover their purpose and make a difference. They long for others who will accompany them on this journey. They want to stop pretending they have it all figured out. They want room to learn from failure. They want safe places to share their vulnerability. They want freedom to roam around at the edges of disciplines and traditions, seeking a fertile space where new ways of doing life can be born.

The move toward leadership grounded in self-awareness and honesty is fragile, however, because it runs counter to strong currents in our culture. These currents teach us to think that for "strong leaders," independence trumps interdependence; coercion is superior to collaboration; the all-knowing expert is wiser than the collective wisdom of a community; and success is measured by a test score or a tax bracket.

The CARE practices remember other ways of living and leading. These ways of living and leading, fragile at first, become muscular with practice. Where once we walked into a room full of strangers unsure of their willingness to engage in these practices with us, we now anticipate and welcome friends around the world longing to practice another, better way of leading.

### **Is This Book for You?**

This book is for people who ask:

- How do I lead in pursuit of what I'm *for*, rather than getting stuck in what I'm against?
- How can I learn to lead in life-giving ways?
- When I get greater clarity about me and my call, how do I take steps to move in that direction?
- How do I mobilize my organization to be present in the world differently?
- How do we adapt faithfully to the complex shifts in our environment?
- How do I keep on leading change without burning out?

As you can imagine, these questions appeal to a wide cross section of people. We often find they attract people who feel like misfits born at the wrong time. When they find each other, they share a spark of recognition and report the feeling of coming home.

You may be:

- an individual who aspires to discover your own life of meaning and purpose, figuring it out for the first time, or once again,
- a guide or facilitator who, by role or by nature, helps others discover meaning and purpose,
- a leader of an organization who wrestles with how to create lasting and positive change in your context.

You may find yourself living out more than one of these roles simultaneously. Maybe you are a young person who already facilitates soul-filled practices of discernment among your peers. Maybe you are an entrepreneur launching a social enterprise. Maybe you are the leader in a congregation, institution of higher education, or community organization who names, notices, and nurtures the gifts of young people in your midst.

This book is also for people in any of the above categories who long to become who they were meant to be, *but don't want to go it alone*. It is for young adults who are motivated by their faith to make a difference in the world, including those who are motivated by their faith tradition, and some who call themselves “spiritual but not religious.” It is for all those people who have said to us: “I want to do x, y, and z in my context, but seminary (or my MBA or PhD) didn't prepare me to lead change.”

CARE awakens and sustains leaders, inviting their inner wisdom, their intuition, and their integrated selves into the task of leading change—in themselves, their communities, and the world. It grows out of the life and ways of Jesus, and it reflects ancient cultural traditions and ancient wisdom of the African diaspora. It draws from the time-honored practices of faith communities in which ordinary people inherit and reinvent ancient spiritual traditions. It borrows from benevolent thinkers such as Parker Palmer, Paulo Freire, Howard Thurman, Otto Scharmer, Ella Baker, Margaret Wheatley, Thich Nhat Han, Richard Rohr, and Peter Senge, who themselves have lifted up and revisited strains of wisdom from ancient traditions and cultures.

In the chapters that follow, you will meet some of the thinkers and doers named above. Some of them we tracked down in real time, sitting with them to ask how their work intersected our own, and asking them to help us understand emerging networks of change innovators.

You will see what CARE looks like up close and personal, through the lenses of our own trial-and-error attempts at using the practices. We don't always get it right. In fact we acknowledge that we will never get to a place of always getting it right. We frequently need to stop, breathe, reorient ourselves, and remember that continuing to practice self-awareness in our leadership is a lifelong journey. Grace extended toward us and others is a necessary companion.

*CARE awakens and sustains leaders, inviting their inner wisdom, their intuition, and their integrated selves into the task of leading change.*

## How to Read This Book

In the coming prelude, Matthew describes a moment when he experienced a new kind of space in which to discern his next steps as a leader. This serendipitous exchange lasted only a few minutes and happened unexpectedly, but it altered the course of Matthew's future. Revisiting this moment helps us imagine how the CARE practices mindfully invite such moments into our living and leading.



The subsequent eight chapters alternate between “show me how” chapters that walk through each one of the four CARE practices in turn, and “think it through” chapters that reflect on concepts embedded within the practices. We have organized the book this way because our thinking informs our practices and vice versa. However, readers hungry to begin using the practices may choose to read the practical chapters (1–3–5–7) in order, going back later to read the conceptual (2–4–6–8) chapters in between. Other readers might be curious about the underlying sources and would benefit by turning directly to the conceptual chapters.

In this book, you will find:

### **Another Way: A CARE Manifesto.**

Think of this as a new default setting. Because the leadership ways embedded in CARE are countercultural in most places, we state these declarations up front and revisit them regularly. They remind us of what we know by heart and what we can trust as we do the work of leading change in ourselves, our organizations, and our world. We refer back to them at the end of each chapter.

### **Chapter 1 C: Creating Space**

We invite you inside the brain of a facilitator, who begins to trust the countercultural moves of CARE while leading a high-powered team through a difficult process of change. Here we walk through the first step in CARE: creating space where souls feel welcome to drop down, slow down, and enter into new ways of being together.

### **Chapter 2: The Inner and Outer Tug of Call and Purpose**

Why am I here? What is my life’s purpose? Embedded in these questions are the concepts of call and purpose, which lie at the core of leading change for good. In this chapter, we consider the world as an “inescapable web of mutuality.” Such a communal worldview reshapes “call” and “purpose” from hyper-individual quests to radical interdependency between self, community, and God. This helps us understand how the CARE practices support people as they follow the tug from their present reality into an imagined future in which all can flourish.

### **Chapter 3 A: Asking Self-Awakening Questions**

The stories of our own lives connect us to our deep passion. How do we uncover the stories that lie dormant within us, ready to inspire

and sustain us as we lead change? Here we turn to the second practice in CARE: Asking Self-Awakening Questions. This practice puts us in touch with what we really love, what we care deeply about, and what motivates our acts of courage. Learning to listen and lead from a deep, awakened center is especially important when our leadership challenges structures that undergird exploitation, oppression, or brutality. Self-awakening questions create dialogue that leads persons and communities to wake up and “stay woke.”

#### **Chapter 4: The Work Our Souls Must Have—Vocation and Leadership**

In this chapter, we pause again from the CARE practices to reflect more deeply on concepts embedded within them, this time turning to vocation and leadership. For too long, leadership has been seen as the role of the elite few who are called to create change. Because this messianic view of leadership is so deeply embedded in our culture, here we practice telling and retelling other stories, stories that help us imagine a future in which cocreators follow their inspired dreams, stepping into leadership roles that help a better future emerge.

#### **Chapter 5 R: Reflecting Theologically Together**

Here we explore a particular tradition of theological reflection as an indispensable discipline for leaders and communities that seek to lead change for good. Within the CARE approach, theological reflection engages and critiques inherited ways of reading sacred literature and social life, enabling us to glimpse alternatives to the status quo. This approach, driven by focused dialogue and careful attention to our embodied experiences, also stimulates imagination and insight into particular next steps that leaders can take to build experimental alternatives or to help change ineffective and unjust systems.

#### **Chapter 6: Liberating Leadership**

In this chapter, Matthew shares a way of reenvisioning leadership that evolved from his experiences within the prophetic Black church tradition and the broader Black freedom struggle. This kind of leadership we call “liberating leadership” because it dismantles the dominant forms of living and leading that reinforce the oppressive norms of empire. It helps to create alternative ways of being that open new, expansive possibilities for communities to flourish. Liberating leadership undergirds CARE. Simultaneously, the CARE practices help to create conditions in which “liberating leadership” can emerge.

### Chapter 7 E: Enacting the Next Most Faithful Step

Enacting our next most faithful step is a practice of transforming insight into reflective action. Here we emphasize immediate action that enables us to unearth, test, and reflect on our assumptions and actions in pursuit of a new heaven and new earth. Each word used to describe this practice suggests a set of critical questions that should inform our action. This chapter walks us through an experience of designing preliminary prototypes of solutions to intractable community problems.

### Chapter 8: Embodying CARE

While using these practices with our institution's external partners, we began using them in our own organization. In this chapter, we recap the practices through stories, highlighting moments when we used the CARE practices to transform our organization. You will see here how the practices come into play not as universal, linear steps, but rather as context-specific iterations that weave into and around again and again, more like a dance than a forced march. The practices become more familiar with use, and our failures become learnings that feed aspirations in the next go-round. We end this chapter by reviewing our Manifesto of CARE—a statement to which we return again and again to ground us as we lead.

At the end of each chapter, we pose a set of questions for you to use in quiet reflection as you journal, in conversation with peers, or as you build an intentional learning community. These questions will help you think about how this chapter directly affects you as you live out your leadership role, whether you are:

- **an individual learner or leader** who aspires to discover your own meaning and purpose, figuring it out for the first time, or once again
- **a guide or facilitator** who, by role or by nature, helps others discover meaning and purpose
- **an organizational leader** who wrestles with how to create lasting and positive change in your context

### Our Hope

We hope that as you read this book, you find yourself drawn more purposefully to a community of seekers who know there's got to be another, better way. Across history, we see people with their backs up against the wall finding strength in community, refusing to give in, seeking creative alternatives, and trying something new. Some of it works! Walls fall. Life-giving structures emerge. Age-old wisdom

flows from deep root to trunk to flowering branch. Purpose grows of necessity. And it is all deeply communal, part of the collective “work our souls must have.”<sup>5</sup>

The pursuit of alternatives is urgent. We wrote this book slowly over a three-year period while paying attention to what was going on around us and within us, both the tragedies and the life-giving responses. These included:

- massacre of worshipers at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, South Carolina
- rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and Kaepernick’s NFL protest
- targeted violence against LGBT communities; the proliferation of mass shootings
- rise of Donald Trump and white nationalism
- white supremacy on display in Charlottesville, Virginia
- Women’s March and the #MeToo movement
- travel ban against Muslims
- detention and deportation of immigrants and refugees at the United States–Mexico border
- Standing Rock resistance to the Keystone oil pipeline
- clarion call of climate change voiced by scientists and the experience of weather-related catastrophes

It was a disruptive era within the church as well, including:

- death of institutions
- continued unveiling of widespread sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests, Southern Baptist clergy, and clergy of many other denominations
- rupture of centuries-old denominations

The list goes on. These social upheavals are outcroppings of systems all of us inhabit and internalize. They have catalyzed thousands of

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<sup>5</sup>emilie m. townes, “Ethics as an Art of Doing the Work Our Souls Must Have,” in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader*, ed. Katie Geneva Cannon, emilie m. townes, Angela D. Sims (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 35. Townes is quoting Katie Geneva Cannon, who frequently used this phrase as a definition for vocation. Townes expanded on this phrase in a speech entitled “womanist understanding of vocation,” given on April 13, 2015 at an FTE event in Nashville.. It is archived at [www.leadanotherway.com](http://www.leadanotherway.com)

young people to rise up, using their gifts as poets, prophets, politicians, and protesters to work for change. The change they seek is not small, simple, or insignificant.

As we were writing, we became increasingly clear that we, too, are part of a movement of people pursuing transformed ways of being. Tweaking the status quo is a dead end.

Our hope is that this book will be one among many sparks for conversations that lead to action. Some might call that the work of cocreating the conditions in which a new heaven and a new earth will emerge. This hope requires of us a deep reckoning with the beliefs, habits, and practices through which we have cocreated the world as it is. It also requires that we cultivate new ways of relating to ourselves, one another, and creation for the emergence of “another, better way.”

We wrote this book for leaders, dreamers, and change-makers like us who are yearning for alternatives to the status quo. Here we unpack and offer the best of what we’ve learned together. This exploration is a work in process. It is and will continue to be an unfinished journey.

In the next section, we invite you into a moment of necessity that gives birth to purpose through a story from Matthew’s vocational unfolding. This prelude sets the stage for CARE as a rhythm of stories and reflections or—as our former colleague Elizabeth Mitchell Clement often reminded us—big questions, small journeys, between meals, as life happens.

### Questions for Reflection

#### **For the individual learner seeking meaning and purpose:**

1. In this chapter the authors tell stories about times in their individual journeys when they were challenged to stay connected to something larger than themselves that drew them into leadership. Spend a moment reflecting on your own journey. When have you experienced or felt connection to something larger than yourself, calling you into a role or identity? When did you feel most alive in that connection or call?
2. Stephen writes, “There is a future that mourns if we don’t step forward courageously and use our lives on behalf of the greater good.” How does this idea resonate with you? What will the future mourn if *you* do not live out *your* purpose?
3. What was one challenging idea you encountered in this chapter? What made it so?

4. What was one helpful idea you encountered in this chapter? What made it so?
5. What is one thing you take with you from this chapter that might make a difference in the way you explore your own sense of purpose?

**For the guide/ facilitator helping others find meaning and purpose:**

1. Matthew writes, “After multiple bouts of leadership burnout by age thirty, I noticed that I was living out of a warrior-hero model of leadership that called for me to sacrifice my physical and mental well-being to serve the sacred needs of the community and the cause. My heroic self-understanding as a leader contributed to my cycle of burnout.” How do the people you accompany or the people you know who are seeking to create change express their burnout? What causes contribute to the burnout of leaders in your context? What resources (e.g. stories, lived examples, resiliency practices) exist in your context to help leaders cultivate their inner life in community or to create more sustainable activism?
2. Dori writes, “Six months into my first parish, I found church leadership to be soul-shrinking.” In what ways are the communities in which you live and work soul-shrinking or soul-expanding? What is your role in contributing to the care of souls in these environments?
3. How might a young person watching you describe the way you lead? How intentionally do you invite others into shared leadership?
4. What was one challenging idea you encountered in this chapter? What made it so?
5. What was one helpful idea you encountered in this chapter?
6. What is one thing you take with you from this chapter that might make a difference in the way you mentor or create community?

**For those leading organizational change:**

1. The authors reflect, “We are reminded that people are built to experience community, to find joy in one another, and to

## Another Way

create a better world out of a deep reservoir where soul resides.” Is it part of the culture of your organization to help people connect their soul with their role? What are the challenges to bringing this awareness to your workplace? Who are the potential conversation partners for you as you seek to live and lead on purpose?

2. Collective wisdom and meaning-making is necessary to solve complex global problems such as climate change, vast economic inequity, and systemic injustices. How are organizations in your sector (nonprofit, business, higher education, religious, etc.) exploring a more communal understanding of leadership and more collaborative approaches to work?
3. What was one challenging idea you encountered in this chapter? What made it so?
4. What was one helpful idea you encountered in this chapter? What made it so?
5. What is one thing you take with you from this chapter that might make a difference in the way you lead change within your organization or within your sector?

### For all:

1. Review *Another Way: The CARE Manifesto* on the next page. Which sentences stand out to you after reading this chapter?
2. We are building an interactive playlist to accompany each chapter. You can find it on Spotify at **Another Way: The Book**. The song we recommend for this chapter is “We’ve Come a Long Way to Be Together” by Bernice Johnson Reagon. Please add to the playlist as you are inspired.