

Spring 2019.

Dear Friends,

We thank you from the heart for your support of the *ScholarLeaders Women's PeerLeader Forum*, which convened for its second annual gathering at the end of October 2018. This meeting could not have happened without your generosity.

This year's group of 12 met in Panama City, Panama before the International Council for Evangelical Theological Education (ICETE) conference. Half of this group had attended our first *Women's PeerLeader Forum* in Boston in 2017; half were new. Among the new attendees were Dr. Chee Chiew Lee, the first female faculty member at Singapore Bible College; Dr. Dinorah Méndez, the first and only female faculty member at her seminary in Mexico City; and Dr. Jung-Sook Lee, the president of Torch Trinity Graduate University in Seoul.



The 2018 Women's PeerLeader Forum.

As they lead theological education in the Majority World, each of these women has achieved extraordinary accomplishments. Each has successfully earned a PhD and holds the position of President, Provost, or Academic Dean in her institution.

Yet each is typically the only woman to have such a role at her institution and therefore is surrounded by male colleagues. As they navigate paternalistic institutions and/or cultures where they can be marginalized, these women often experience isolation. Despite these challenges, they are strong in their sense of calling to lead theological education and to advocate for other aspiring women. In addition to these pressures, as international conference speakers, these leaders are part of a small pool of qualified women, so they are frequently sought after. This becomes both an opportunity and a burden as they feel selected to represent all women with excellence.

The *Women's PeerLeader Forum* gives these women the opportunity to talk freely, without the strain of nuance and negotiation usually required from women in leadership. Such freedom permits them to find true intellectual, emotional, and spiritual support.

I, Meritt, helped to convene this year's meeting. The *Forum* operated on a cohort model so that 2017's group of 6 had time together to update one another with more transparency. 2018's group formed the second cohort, and this model kept the *Forum's* growth from overwhelming the women's pressing need for close friendship.

All 12 participants expressed surprise at God’s goodness for this time of equipping. New members discovered that, together with the previous group, they could share stories and wisdom freely. One woman reacted, “I have been living in a desert and found an oasis.” They laughed and wept as they recognized the burdens that each woman had been carrying alone and could now share with others. The women found a space where they had “a seat at the table” – a space of dignity in which to reflect on their unique capabilities as women leaders, a space of freedom in which to express their frustrations as marginalized individuals, and a space of love and grace in which to be vulnerable.

The participants represented several Majority World countries – Kenya, Ethiopia, Côte D’Ivoire, the Philippines, India, South Korea, Singapore, Mexico, and Costa Rica. Such diversity should have



Members of the Women’s PeerLeader Forum visit the Panama Canal.

mandated restraint, to ensure no offense given by someone from one culture to someone from another. But the participants noted that they never felt in danger of misunderstanding. They sang in many languages. They sampled food from one another’s countries. So deep was the bond that these women formed that they continued to reunite spontaneously during ICETE. Together, they were one-third of the Majority World women at the conference, which indicates the pressing need for more women leaders.

Since the *Forum*, participants have continued to dialogue via messaging, sharing devotionals, photos, songs, prayer requests, and jokes. They plan to reconvene in the Philippines in October 2019.

The effect of the *Women’s PeerLeader Forum* ripples into its participants’ lives and institutions. As one woman said, “I feel like we have known each other for a long time rather [than] a couple of days. This makes me want to give to other women.” Each of the 12 women agreed to mentor 3 or 4 other women in her home context. They especially plan to help their mentees avoid the problems that women leaders often encounter – self-sabotage through overwork or self-minimizing language – and to help them express their unique giftedness as women for Christ’s Kingdom.

Thank you for enabling the *Forum* through your gifts. We hope that you will consider supporting the 2019 *Forum* and that you will join us in praying for the fruits of these women’s leadership.

Blessings to you,

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