Participating in the Cal Turner Program for Moral Leadership this year has given me a renewed appreciation for the diversity of human beings’ voices and approaches, the richness of individuals’ creativity in thinking through problems, and the specificity of disciplinary training. Perhaps what I most appreciate about the program is its intentional encouragement of cooperation across the fields of divinity, medicine, business, law, engineering, education, and public policy, its challenge to young developing professionals to reach out to unlikely colleagues. From the start of the fellowship year, the fellows met one another in dialogue. Our retreat in August gave me a taste of some of the difficult but inspiring conversations I would enjoy with my peers over the next several months.

During our ethical leadership conferences in the fall and spring, I found myself most aware of the vastly diverse ways in which lawyers, teachers, pastors, doctors, engineers, and businesspeople approach moral dilemmas. I could at times find myself shocked at where others located the problem; my mind simply worked at the issue through different pathways. We found that our differences actually complemented each other quite well; we could enhance and build upon one another’s strengths. The divinity student might find a systemic issue with the presented ethical quandary, the businessperson could imagine how the economic system might change to address the problem, and the education policy maker might offer preventive measures by envisioning how schools could raise awareness about contributors to the identified issue.
These opportunities to consider ethically ambiguous cases in the abstract not only provided us a safe space in which we could anticipate and think through problems before we encountered them, but they also drew my attention to my own weaknesses and suggested how I might address these shortcomings. As a divinity student, I readily critique structures and large-scale policies that give rise to issues—that is, I think often at the macro-level—but when it comes to implementing concrete change, I struggle. My training focuses less on equipping me with a particular skill set and so I must rely upon the specialties of others. I can bring a passion and raise awareness about what is wrong, to speak theologically about my setting or mobilize churches, but I cannot always say how in reality to make things rights. As I have worked with my group on our project (establishing a housing trust fund (HTF) for Nashville), I have learned a great deal. Entering the year, I knew almost nothing about the policy or the process to establish a HTF. Collaboratively, however, our group has found that we can draw upon our special skills and strengths to make meaningful change.

As we have engaged in different parts of the process of establishing a HTF, we have expanded our cooperative efforts even further beyond the Cal Turner Fellows group. The HTF group has reached out to Nashville community to learn more about the local Nashville government, the housing market, and the city’s political landscape. The community group too is diverse, including a Methodist minister, affordable housing advocates, real estate agents, and community builders. Some of the previous year’s fellows joined us in our efforts, and we anticipate continuing the project into the future. Although the fellowship itself is over, many of the fellows have found our work engaging and important; we believe in the task and hope to make it a reality. Thus far, we have mobilized community members around the issue, gathered significant data on HTFs’ financial, criminal, and commercial impacts upon the cities in which they are established, created a position especially dedicated to attending to the political action
required to enable HTF legislation’s passage and implementation, and begun fundraising for
this created position. While we have now recognized that setting out to establish a HTF in a
ten-month period proved far too ambitious of a goal, our group has made great headway in
raising awareness about Nashville’s lack of affordable housing and the benefits HTFs bring.
Part of this effort has consisted in recognizing how massive and complex a task it is to establish
legislation and in recruiting an individual to be almost solely dedicated to the effort.
Sometimes, I think our group has learned, strong leadership necessitates that we acknowledge
our limits.

Overall, my involvement with this fellowship has enabled me to build strong
relationships, engage in enriching conversation, confirm my belief that it is important that I
always work in my community in some manner. Hopefully my own and my group’s efforts as a
part of this fellowship have served Nashville well, albeit in a small way. I take with me a great
desire and conviction to approach future projects in a similar fashion, seeking expertise from
individuals from different arenas. Furthermore, I greatly appreciate the tremendous support
and resources that the Cal Turner Program has made available to us: the continued informal
gatherings for meals and conversation, the structured conferences that urged us to think about
ethical dilemmas in the abstract to prepare us better for when they happen on the ground, the
faculty and staff members who encouraged and contributed to the success of our efforts, and for
the excellent group of colleagues I found in the other fellows.