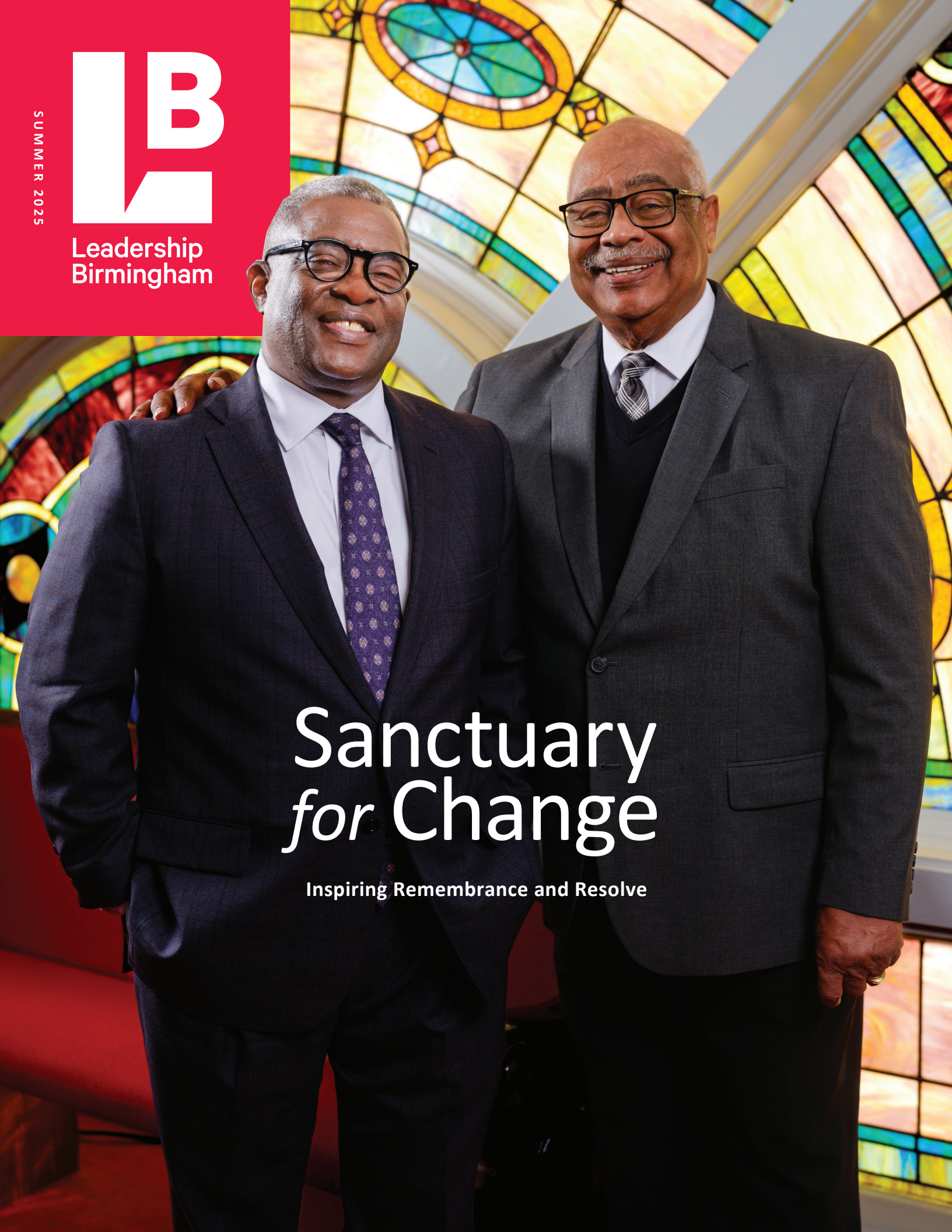


SUMMER 2025



Leadership
Birmingham

A photograph of two men in business suits standing in front of a large, colorful stained glass window. The man on the left is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. The man on the right is wearing a grey suit, a white shirt, and a patterned tie, and has his hand on the shoulder of the man on the left. The stained glass window behind them features various colors including yellow, orange, red, and blue.

Sanctuary *for* Change

Inspiring Remembrance and Resolve

Sanctuary for Change

AN ICONIC CHURCH INSPIRES
REMEMBRANCE AND RESOLVE

Photos by Art Meripol



We know Birmingham's history. We've seen the 1960s black-and-white photos. But generations after the civil rights movement, it can be difficult to imagine the community we love as that same city of segregation, cruelty, and courage in the face of danger.

Then we visit Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

The Rev. Arthur Price (LB '13), the congregation's pastor, has watched visitors' eyes widen as their faces reflect shock and disbelief. Often they weep, overcome by the emotion and magnitude of the tragedy of September 15, 1963, when a bombing at the church killed four young girls preparing for Sunday school and injured more than 20 others. Seeing and moving through the space and hearing stories—many told by church members who experienced the historic events firsthand—brings “a 1963 context to a 2025 world,” Price says. “They feel the weight” of the struggles of the civil rights era.

That transformative experience is one reason why the church is a frequent stop for both Leadership Birmingham and Youth Leadership Birmingham classes, with many alumni calling it one of the most powerful, impactful visits of their program year. “It’s a symbol of strength, sacrifice, and suffering,” Price says. “It’s a place where souls were stirred, where systems were challenged. It’s a place that became a catalyst for change to make Birmingham better.”

DEVOTION TO ACTION
Sixteenth Street's role as a sanctuary has always given

people the confidence to open their hearts and minds without intimidation or judgment, says Ted Debro (LB '93), a longtime church member who has chaired its board of trustees. The city's first Black church, dating from 1873, Sixteenth Street became a focal point for civil rights activists throughout the 20th century. W.E.B. DuBois, Mary McLeod Bethune, Paul Robeson, and Ralph Bunche all spoke there. During the civil rights movement, the church hosted mass meetings—many led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth—to organize and plan protests.

Today the church continues that tradition by addressing current issues of equal access and equal treatment. Several ministries support local schools, underserved families, and people experiencing homelessness, and the church collaborates with Jefferson County's drug court and family court to help offenders begin new chapters in their lives. In January, Sixteenth Street hosted Leadership Birmingham's Economic Development Day, highlighting ways it and other predominantly Black churches connect people to job opportunities and training.

The congregation shares its unique story in a way that “moves people to make a commitment to make a difference,” says Debro, the retired community programs director for the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity. “The girls that were killed didn't have the opportunity to make that choice; I think God made the choice for them to make a difference in the world. Now we have to pick up that mantle and make a difference, too.”

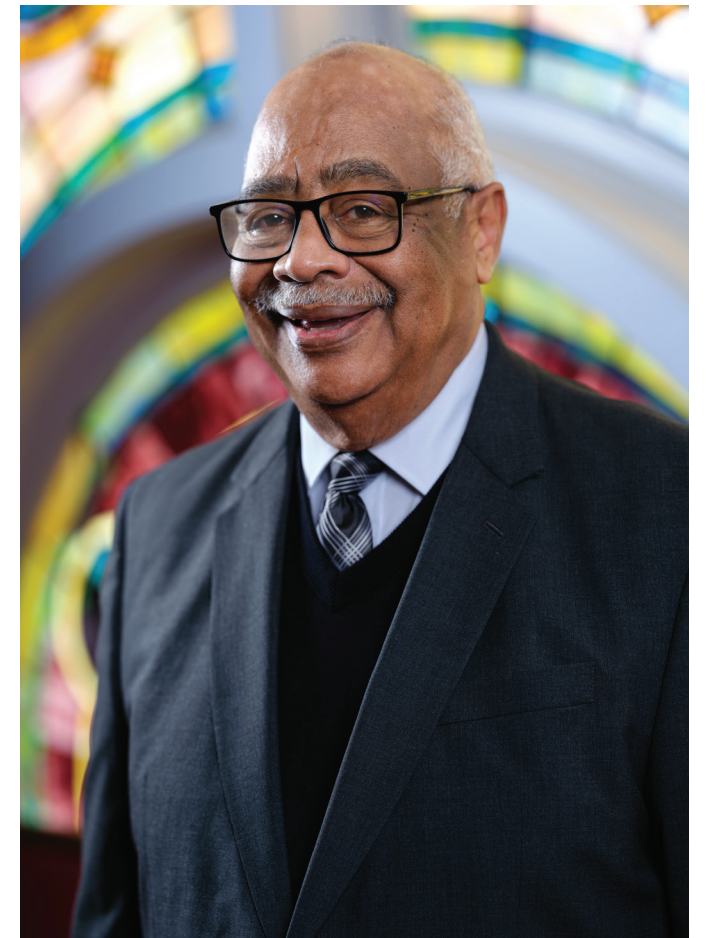
That message especially resonates

with young people, Price says. “Our tour guides and members remind them that people in the movement were their age. That gets their attention ... and sparks a sense of civil engagement to make an impact.”

WELCOMING SPIRIT

Price and Debro say the church's dual role raises unusual challenges. The historic site attracting more than 100,000 visitors from around the world each year must coexist with the spiritual home for a congregation numbering about 300. Though conflicts sometimes occur, the congregation doesn't view the church's special legacy as a burden, Price says.

“We have been given a gift from God, and we have to share that gift with the world,” Debro adds. He emphasizes that the church is no museum, however. Instead, the tours and historical displays are part of a ministry—a “living sermon” that merges Bible quotes with Sixteenth Street stories, ultimately focusing on “a love that forgives,” the theme of the Sunday school lesson scheduled for September 15, 1963. “The message is that we must show compassion, that we have to forgive even death and



the cruelties of the 1960s in order to move forward to a better world,” Debro says.

With the church constantly in use, preservation of the building—designed by pioneering Black architect Wallace Rayfield and opened in 1911—is an ongoing concern. In recent years Debro and other members have led efforts to renovate the basement, where the four girls were when the bomb detonated, to better accommodate visitors and displays, along with restoring other parts of the structure. Grants from community partners, the National Park Service—the church is part of the Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument—and the National Trust for Historic Preservation have



(LEFT) The Rev. Arthur Price has served as the church's pastor since 2002. (TOP) Ted Debro joined the congregation more than 30 years ago.

supported that work and helped launch an endowment to fund future preservation initiatives.

Last year the nonprofit Lilly Endowment presented Sixteenth Street with a \$2.5 million grant to support preservation and the construction of an Education and Visitors Center. The new facility, located next door, will provide space for reflection and connection while alleviating stress on the historic building, Debro says. “After people have had the experience in the church—after they’ve gone through the horrors of 1963—they will have an environment to sit down and dialogue with one another,” he explains. In the center’s restaurant, for example, visitors will gather at large tables for family-style dining and conversation. In the lobby, an interactive wall styled after the church’s stained glass will display personal commitments for change submitted by visitors.

Debro calls the church “sacred ground”—not only for its history but also because it kindles hope for a brighter tomorrow. The building and its stories connect the past to the present and offer a “starting point” for the future, he says.

“People see Sixteenth Street Baptist Church as a symbol of justice in the same way people see the Liberty Bell as a symbol of freedom,” Price adds. “We know what it means to take up that fight. We’ve been there before.” ■

(RIGHT) Recent restoration projects aid Sixteenth Street’s efforts to meet the community’s spiritual needs while welcoming hundreds of thousands of visitors to the historic site. **(COVER)** Price and Debro help the church continue to serve as a catalyst for personal transformation and social change.



Birmingham's Future Begins Today

NEW YOUTH FUND HONORS MIMI TYNES'S LEADERSHIP LEGACY



Photo: Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham

Family “Mimi” Tynes (LB ’84), who died in 2024, is survived by more than 1,400 children—a daughter, two sons, plus all the student participants in Youth Leadership Birmingham (YLB) across its 40-year

history. As a YLB cofounder, she poured her love for teaching and learning, her faith in the community, and her hopes for the future into the program, causing her to have a hand in raising multiple generations of curious, compassionate, confident young leaders.

(ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT) Mimi Tynes joins Kate Nielsen (LB ’96) and Sheila Blair (LB ’84; former LB executive director), two other previous top leaders of the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, in 2013.

Now YLB is launching the Mimi Tynes Youth Leadership Fund to honor her innovative leadership and her legacy. YLB traditionally has welcomed student participants at no cost to them or their families—a commitment that has become more challenging as the cost of implementing a high-quality youth program has risen since its 1986 beginnings. The new fund “will sustain Mimi’s vision of a tuition-free program to diminish the socioeconomic divide in each class and to demonstrate our community’s investment in the future of local young leaders,” says Katherine Berdy, YLB’s director.

Family and friends have described Tynes as caring, a good listener, gregarious, genuine, and full of infectious enthusiasm. She parlayed those traits into a passion for leadership aimed at improving the Birmingham region. In 1993 she joined the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham (CFGB) as its first program officer. Five years later she was named executive director, and under her watch the CFGB ranked in the top 100 in asset size, and in the top 50 in grants awarded, among 500 community foundations nationwide. Tynes continued to support the CFGB following her retirement in 2000, including a planned gift for the Community Fund to benefit nonprofits.

“When Mimi passed away, the CFGB board approved a \$10,000 grant to an eligible organization chosen by Mimi’s family to honor her life and service,” says Christopher Nanni (LB ’15), CFGB president and CEO. “With her strong legacy of leadership ... it is no surprise that Mimi’s family chose to make that grant to YLB, an organization that brings together our area’s best and brightest youth to explore important issues and help develop

our community’s next generation of leaders. We’re pleased that the CFGB was able to honor her life and work in this way, and that her impact on Birmingham will continue in perpetuity.”

The CFGB gift, matched by an allocation from Leadership Birmingham, forms the heart of the Mimi Tynes Youth Leadership Fund. Berdy says the goal is to grow the fund through additional contributions from YLB and Leadership Birmingham alumni and other community members so that it not only sustains the youth program but also expands student opportunities. With enough support, YLB may eventually be able to “provide college scholarships to one or more deserving class members,” Berdy says.

Contributions to YLB yield immediate dividends because the students are eager to make a difference in the community today, Berdy notes. “In an increasingly siloed world, we believe investment in authentic, in-person, and community-centered relationships is vital to our individual growth and collective progress,” she says. “YLB selects the brightest students throughout Jefferson County, helps them learn about each other, and connects them with important issues, leaders, businesses, and mentors in our region. They learn about our region through carefully crafted program days that build knowledge, skills, and confidence.”

Every student who graduates from YLB carries a legacy from Tynes, who “used what she learned to address problems that impacted the people and communities around her,” Berdy says. The Mimi Tynes Youth Leadership Fund will ensure that legacy—her wholehearted dedication to community engagement, relationship building, and solving problems together—will forever flourish and grow. ■



Each YLB class includes a diverse group of sophomores and juniors from public, private, parochial, charter, and home schools throughout Jefferson County. Since 1986, student participants have represented 13 school systems and more than 50 high schools.



YLB invites you to contribute to the Mimi Tynes Youth Leadership Fund via the envelope in this issue or online at leadershipbirmingham.org/support.

MOMENTS *of* IMPACT

WHAT SURPRISED YOU DURING YOUR PROGRAM YEAR?

Was it a fact you learned, an insight you gained—or perhaps something you discovered about yourself? Several members of the Leadership Birmingham and Youth Leadership Birmingham (YLB) Class of 2025 describe defining moments they will always remember.

■ “What has stood out to me most is the disconnect that sometimes exists between the vast resources within our community and the people or organizations that need them most. However, thanks to this program, I’ve witnessed firsthand how these gaps can be bridged through meaningful connections and collaboration. When we take the time to learn about one another—our strengths, challenges, and shared goals—we can identify opportunities to work together more effectively. That’s where real impact happens. When we cultivate a diverse network, we become more effective leaders, collaborators, and problem solvers for our city. I look forward to applying that mindset in all that I do.”

DULCE RIVERA

CEO, MI PUEBLO SUPERMARKET



Dulce Rivera

■ “My greatest insight was gained from my combined experiences of Education Day and Justice Day. The lack of opportunities in our education system creates an overloaded court system that leads to a dysfunctional prison system. The most disheartening piece of this is that this pipeline severely impacts our city’s most vulnerable: our children. We must work to resolve these issues for their sake. “[Leadership Birmingham] has allowed us a space to come together to learn from each other. It has increased our networks of people with whom we enjoy our great city and lock arms to do the work so that we leave Birmingham better for the next generation.”

REGGIE TORBOR

PRESIDENT, PYLON BUILDING GROUP

■ “One of my most meaningful experiences was meeting the mayor



Reggie Torbor

of Birmingham. Through this conversation, we learned about his passion for juvenile reforms. He has worked on conflict resolution strategies in schools to combat generational prison pipelines. Hearing these strategies from a prominent leader of the community was monumental! It made me realize that lawmakers do care about their constituents and youth concerns. After that open discussion, I started communicating with my lawmakers and speaking out about social issues. In future, I want to continue this work, interning in city hall and coordinating with advocacy groups to influence local, state, and national policy.”

SOFIA NUNEZ

STUDENT, JEFFERSON COUNTY INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE SCHOOL



Sofia Nunez

■ “One thing that surprised me is how much my communication skills have evolved. I was kind of shy when I first got to the Opening Retreat, but after realizing that everyone there is going through the same thing and getting to know each other, it helped me become more open to talk to people.

“YLB has taught me a lot of things about the community. One thing we focused on was the civil rights movement and how it changed Birmingham throughout the 1960s. It encouraged me to help the community with different Black-owned businesses.”

TYSON AGUILLARD

STUDENT, RAMSEY HIGH SCHOOL



Tyson Aguillard

■ “So much of Leadership Birmingham is about engaging with people who are not often visible in the community. During Human Services Day, we sat in on the Encore Community Respite Program at Canterbury United Methodist Church,



Sid Evans

which helps people suffering from dementia as well as their caregivers. As someone whose father had dementia for more than a decade, I was inspired by the brilliant work of Program Director Patti Williams as well as the other volunteers. We had the rare opportunity to take part in one of the sessions, to see the smiles and hear the laughs of the participants, and to witness the important work this program is doing.

“Every time I finish a program day, I come away inspired to find ways I can make a difference though my own work and connections. The problems we hear about are daunting—and sometimes depressing—but the passion and creativity of my fellow classmates gives me hope that we can help this city become a much better place.”

SID EVANS

EDITOR IN CHIEF, SOUTHERN LIVING

■ “The insights I gained through Leadership Birmingham have encouraged me to reconsider leadership in a more holistic and expansive way. Additionally, the emphasis on speaking out on challenging topics has influenced how I engage with difficult conversations in the medical field. For instance, addressing health disparities within our community can be uncomfortable, but I now recognize the importance of tackling these issues with transparency and openness. This approach is especially crucial when advocating for marginalized or underserved populations, where boldness and courage can drive meaningful change.

“Furthermore, the advice to widen my lens beyond my own experiences has reshaped how I view patient care and community involvement. I am now more mindful of the diverse backgrounds, values, and needs of the people I serve. I am

committed to being more open minded and proactive in understanding the unique challenges my patients face, and I plan to approach community

health with a greater emphasis on inclusivity and cultural competence.”

KENESHIA KIRKSEY

OWNER, PHYSICAL MEDICINE AND REHABILITATION OF ALABAMA, PC

■ “YLB blessed me with opportunities to seek other people’s opinions, ideas, and thoughts. This is important because hearing and understanding different perspectives is how we grow stronger as a community. On Arts Day, I had the opportunity to meet several artists and creative professionals. We discussed qualities of artists—creative, intuitive, methodical, perseverant, etc.—and which qualities were shared with leaders. The concluding question was, ‘Is good leadership an art?’ This taught me that leadership has no single

correct form, no ‘right way,’ and no guaranteed formula for success. Learning how to adequately lead takes time, creativity, patience, and having

an understanding of the people you are leading—all of which are attainable by making yourself aware of the people around you, stepping outside



Keneshia Kirksey

of yourself, and asking yourself the question, ‘Why do I believe this? Why do I stand for it?’ Above all, YLB has shown me the value of seeing the best in others and serving my community with respect and dedication.”

MATTHEW HESS

STUDENT, BRIARWOOD CHRISTIAN SCHOOL



Matthew Hess

“This taught me that leadership has no single correct form, no ‘right way,’ and no guaranteed formula for success. Learning how to adequately lead takes time, creativity, patience, and having an understanding of the people you are leading.”

—MATTHEW HESS



■ **SEE THE SPEECH BUBBLE?** It represents the dialogue at the heart of Leadership Birmingham—conversations that bridge divides, create relationships, deepen understanding, and ultimately change the Birmingham region for the better.

Simple shapes and a clear meaning produce a strong impact in print, digital, and social media.

■ **FRESH COLORS** give Leadership Birmingham a unique identity. (The green and gold of the past veered a little too close to UAB's familiar colors.)



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MAKING OUR MARK

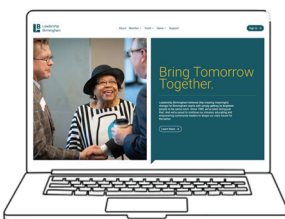
Earlier this year, Leadership Birmingham unveiled its first branding update since its founding more than 40 years ago. Take a closer look at these dynamic new emblems, created in partnership with Big Com:

The need for a makeover: The previous branding for Leadership Birmingham and Youth Leadership Forum did not connect the two programs. Rethinking logos also offered an opportunity to spotlight the programs' distinctive format and spirit.



■ **A NEW NAME AND LOGO** for Youth Leadership Birmingham build upon the parent organization's reputation and highlight their similar missions. The related emblems establish a cohesive, consistent brand image that will help raise public awareness of both Leadership Birmingham and Youth Leadership Birmingham—one key to the programs' strategic growth.

■ **VIBRANT COLORS** reflect the energy, ideas, and boundless potential of the program's young participants.



INFO CENTRAL: leadershipbirmingham.org
A bright new website makes it easier to find essential details about Leadership Birmingham and Youth Leadership Birmingham, including a Leadership Birmingham members directory, calendars, online giving for dues and donations, application/nomination details, and more.

Anger Management

America seems to have reached its boiling point. Insults and accusations over political and cultural issues

fill our screens and streets, legislative chambers, and even, in some cases, our own homes.

Kurt Gray, a social psychologist at Ohio State University, has researched the roots of this wrath and details his discoveries in a

new book, *Outraged: Why We Fight About Morality and Politics and How to Find Common Ground*.

This August, Gray will visit Birmingham to share his findings at an event hosted by Leadership Birmingham, the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham (CFGB), and the Alabama Humanities Alliance (AHA).

Christopher Nanni (LB '15), CFGB president and CEO, and Chuck Holmes (LB '18), AHA executive director, preview Gray's book, his visit, and his insights—which could hold the key to healing our society's deep divisions.

NANNI: "[Gray's] model is that we are all, at the core, motivated by the fear of harm. So you can take

almost any political issue, and the difference comes in with who we feel is going to be harmed. With abortion,

for example, some people tend to be more concerned about the life of the mother while others focus more on the fetus. With immigration, some see people who may be escaping a tough situation, trying to make a better life.

And for others, it's more about breaking the law and not going by established protocol. Once you can identify what someone is concerned about—who's being harmed in those situations—you can begin to understand where they're coming from. Then we can have a conversation. But if I immediately jump to 'you're crazy,' then it cuts off any communication."

HOLMES: "The author has devoted his life to analyzing human behavior and contextualizing it in this era of many cultural and political divisions. He does a good job of postulating why we do what we do, how we react to people who don't agree with us, and how

that's amped up by social media, TV news, and the decline of community engagement."

NANNI: "We live in the most fragmented community in the Southeast. It's easy to exist in our own bubbles. And especially with social media, we can create the environment we're most comfortable in. A lot of people are threatened when they come in contact with differences. There's a tendency to demonize the other when you disagree with them.

"[*Outraged*] reinforces the concept of 'CIV' in 'civil' as standing for 'connect, invite, and validate.' That fits the narrative that people are not changed by data. Data is important to inform people, but you can't lead with it. It's really about [listening to each other's] stories.

And when you build a relationship with someone, you see them as human.

"That ties into things we're working on. [At the CFGB,] we have the Instruments of Hope Unity Fund that Jeffrey and Gail Bayer started, and last year we piloted a Healing

Circles model based on the premise of [sharing] stories. It's about understanding that we all have the same hopes and aspirations, and then allowing people to see differences. After the pilot, we made a grant to the AHA to expand the program."

HOLMES: "Most well-meaning, good-hearted, thinking people, no matter their place in the political spectrum, are frustrated. Why can't we get along? Kurt's book reinforces that we have to see people as human beings, and we have to listen [to each other] to have any hope for meaningful relationship

building that leads to dialogue and change.

"When people hear Kurt in August, there's going to be interactivity with the audience—some deep thinking about how

we engage one another. Hopefully they will leave with some nugget of information, some practice, some idea that they can use in their daily interactions with others. It's hard work, but it's meaningful."

OUTRAGED



KURT GRAY

KURT GRAY
August 25, 6:00 p.m.
Red Mountain Theatre

Purchase tickets at
woventogether.swell.gives

No two Leadership Birmingham program years are alike.

Each class encounters a unique mix of people and places.



The Class of 2023 visits the Hoover Crescent Islamic Center.

However, you likely visited a place of worship such as Sixteenth Street Baptist Church.

If you were in the Class of 2006, you went to Covenant Community Church, the Birmingham Islamic Society, and Temple Emanu-El during One

Community Day, which might have set a record.

That day's theme, "Different Views on Common Ground: Looking at the Community Through Multiple

Lenses," encapsulates the reason we visit places of worship and most other program-day destinations: to learn about different communities from people who are part of them. Several members over the years have admitted to me that they initially were nervous about visiting unfamiliar places of worship but were pleasantly surprised by the experience.

I have been struck by the warm welcome each class receives from the leaders of the places of worship we visit, along with their eagerness to tell their stories. We leave with a better understanding of each community—and a stronger appreciation for the larger community we share.



Libba Vaughan | *Executive Director*

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WE WELCOME YOUR IDEAS FOR PROGRAMS AND NEWSLETTER STORIES.

UPDATE YOUR PROFILE IN THE MEMBERS DIRECTORY ON OUR WEBSITE OR SEND IT TO [INFO@LEADERSHIPBIRMINGHAM.ORG](mailto:info@leadershipbirmingham.org).

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