



WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

Women, people of color more likely to pastor smaller churches and to pioneer in cross-racial appointments

By Julie Kathleen Schubring

While there are few surprises in a recently released study on the status and career paths of U.S. United Methodist clergy, the findings still offer a blueprint for how the denomination can better address institutional sexism and racism in our clergy recruitment, compensation and deployment systems.

The State of Female and Racial/Ethnic United Methodist Clergy in the U.S. by Eric B. Johnson, was a joint project of by the General Commission on Religion and Race, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW), and the National Association of Commission on Equitable Compensation. The project found:

- » The number of U.S. congregations led by women grew by 45% between 1997 and 2008. During that same 11-year period, the number of racial-ethnic pastors leading church increased by 22%.
- » Women led a larger percentage of congregations (36%) in the Northeastern Jurisdiction in 2008, than in the Southeastern Jurisdiction (20%).
- » Larger congregations are far less likely to have a lead female pastor than smaller congregations. The percentage of female sole/lead pastors decreases dramatically as congregational size increases, from 25-45% of smaller congregations led by women to less than 5% of congregations with 5,000-plus members.
- » The denomination's push for more open itinerancy has resulted in greater increases in women (particularly white women) as pastoral leaders than for racial/ethnic persons. In 2008 women comprised 29% of the clergy serving U.S. United Methodist congregations, while only 13% of pastors were racial/ethnic.

The executive summary and full report of the study is online in each of the organizations' websites: gcsrw.org, gcorr.org, and gfa.org/nacec.

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Even now in 2012, too many United Methodist congregations reject the appointment of a pastor who is a woman or who is from a racial group other than their own. And bishops and cabinets too often affirm such biases, instead of challenging parishes to embrace new ways and become more open to such requests. Also, often neither congregations nor clergy are provided sufficient support, training and encouragement to make such appointments a success.

“Having a church ready for a woman pastor or a pastor that may be of a different ethnicity than the congregation should not be the work of the pastor going into the appointment. It should have been the work that is on-going in the church already,” according to Elaine Moy, GCSRW assistant general secretary who oversees research and monitoring.

Most pastors in cross-cultural appointments are people of color going to a white church. There are fewer white pastors trained to serve and be assigned to racial/ethnic congregations. Also, as the United States—and intercultural partnerships, friendships and families—continue to grow, new church members will seek congregations that model appreciation for and comfort with a multiracial, multicultural environment.

If we want to grow our membership, churches need to be open to welcoming and accepting all those who come through the door. The U.S. church is more than 90% white, while the U.S. population is only 63.4% white. The demographics are quickly changing. As of July 1, 2011 the U.S. Census Bureau reports that the number of new births is 50.4% non-white births.

As I am a young white woman, I think this report should be read by everyone in The United Methodist Church. It is an especially important read for racial/ethnic clergy, young clergy and those currently studying to enter the ministry. And I hope district superintendents, bishops and cabinet members and staff-parish relations committees read this study to see how their decision making processes when making appointments affects the entire denomination.

Having just returned from working with GCSRW at the 2012 General Conference 2012, where I heard about our denominational struggles to nurture vital leadership and vital congregations, I feel it is more important than ever to look at statistical information about where we have been.

Much has been accomplished in our denominational history in elevating female and racial/ethnic pastoral leadership. Yet this report reminds us that there is still much work to be accomplished to demonstrate an appropriate representation of clergy serving congregations.

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