

## **Women by the Numbers/ March 2015**

### **Beyond the Stained-Glass Ceiling, Part II:**

Last month, *Women by the Numbers: Beyond that Stained Glass Ceiling*, looked at the status of women in the pipeline to senior leadership in government and corporate sectors, and asked what the status of women in the pipeline is across the United Methodist denomination. This month, we look more in depth at the status of women in the pipeline to senior leadership positions within local church and annual conference leadership. How many women are ordained each year, appointed as senior pastors of large churches, and become District Superintendents and Bishops—all considered leadership positions with powerful influence within our denomination?

As stated last month, of the 12 million United Methodist church members, 54% are women. These church members see a female leading from the pulpit only 22% of the time, their District led by a female Superintendent 27% of the time, and their Annual Conference led by a female bishop only 27% of the time. Of the clergy ordained in 2011, roughly 25% of them were women. Many of the 50 largest churches have women on their pastoral staff but only 1 lists a woman as a senior pastor. What can the denomination intentionally do to ensure women can move through the pipeline to senior leadership positions?

Many Annual Conferences are supporting and providing the experiences and training necessary for female clergy to move up the leadership pipeline. The Virginia Annual Conference for example, at one point had an intentional mentoring program to train and equip women who felt called to become senior pastors of large churches. One female clergy interviewed from Virginia mentioned the conference has also had a female bishop and female district superintendents, and that seeing women in these roles gives her hope that should she feel called to these roles, she may someday attain them.

So why are the numbers still not moving towards full and equal access for women in our denomination? One male clergy member stated he sees many female clergy who already demonstrate great leadership skills and who would be wonderful leading larger churches, but he does not see as many large churches willing and ready to accept a female senior pastor, no matter how qualified they are to lead. The denomination needs to work both sides of the equation—clergywomen AND churches.

An approach to addressing this issue might be asking what can be done to help churches become ready and willing to accept a woman as their senior or solo pastor. When churches tell District Superintendents they do not want a woman appointed to serve as lead pastor of their congregation, what are some options that District Superintendents can take? One option could be, whether appointing a woman right away or not, providing both the pastor and the congregation with ongoing support and educational opportunities in which they discuss implicit biases and the challenges women face as leaders. In addition, asking that a congregation hold a Bible study about women in scripture, the role of women in John Wesley's ministry, the many roles women had during Jesus' ministry. One resource a DS could use is the "Women Called to Ministry" study.

When asked what they would do if a church requested a female clergy not be appointed to their congregation, one District Superintendent said they remind the church that the United Methodist Church's denominational policy does not allow for discrimination and that naming the church's request as such helps them see their actions as discriminatory. Another District Superintendent said it is helpful, to remind the church that the United Methodist Church is a diverse organization with a diverse clergy who bring many different gifts. The DS then assures them that they will make the best match possible, without regard to race, gender, physical ability. Yet Another DS says they always refer to the female clergy as Reverend because it is important to confer authority on the female clergy and to name her skills. Each DS interviewed stated the importance of naming the church's actions as discrimination, telling the church this is not acceptable in the denomination and conferring authority upon the female clergy, assuring the church that this person is the best fit for their congregation.

While it is important that women seek out mentors and programs aimed to develop the skills needed for them to move up the pipeline to leadership, it cannot be the sole responsibility of women to change this culture, something the corporate sector in Australia is working to address. In a recent article in the McKinsey Quarterly, sex discrimination commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission, Elizabeth Broderick, details how this issue was identified and what intentional actions are being taken to address it. Her commission formed and started the group Male Champions of Change comprised of "a dozen powerful men in some of Australia's most prominent organizations." The group meets four times a year in person to share stories, support and empower one another to be bolder and more courageous in their leadership when addressing gender inequality in their organizations.

The group came up with one intentional action to address gender inequality, taking what they defined as the "panel pledge." In this pledge the Male Champions commit to ask conference organizers, "What are you doing to ensure gender balance at your event?" anytime they are asked to speak on a panel at a conference. This "panel pledge" has even led some of the Male Champions to decline speaking invitations if women are not represented well as speakers.

What if our denomination took similar measures? What if when clergy men are invited to speak in highly visible, important public events, they asked the organizers what they are doing to ensure gender balance at your event? For example, a male colleague of mine was recently asked to preach during worship at his Annual Conference gathering this June. What if, instead of immediately saying yes, he asked how many women were invited to preach as well? What if he declined the invitation because there were no women preaching or offered the suggestion of a fellow female clergy who he felt was equally as gifted in preaching? One male clergy member who was interviewed, pastor of a medium sized congregation, intentionally invites a woman to preach when he is on vacation, acknowledging the need for women to be *seen* as capable of being in the pulpit. What if more senior pastors in our connection gave their pulpit to a woman when they are away?

Another one of the Male Champions of Change's intentional actions can also serve as example initiatives for Annual Conferences. For instance, Bishops could adapt the Male Champion's "50-50: If not, why not" initiative. Under this initiative, the male executives pledged to intentionally count the number of women on a committee when making committee assignments or when serving on a committee and selecting

speakers for key events. This ensures that roughly 50% committee members or speakers will be male and 50% female. Bishops across the Methodist connection could adopt a similar policy when making appointments to various committees such as creating the worship planning committee for Annual Conference, and when moving clergy into higher levels of leadership such as District Superintendents. As a result of trying to do this, it may be clear to the conference that there is a leak in the pipeline.

It is the role of every person across our denomination regardless of gender, to hold themselves and one another accountable so that everyone's gifts for leadership are equally recognized, cultivated, nurtured, seen, and commended. Methodists, both lay and clergy, at all levels of leadership must be conscious of who is present and speaking at the table and take intentional actions to address inequalities when they arise. This can over time move the culture of our church to a place where our pulpits represent the fullness of God's human family, where everyone has the opportunity to live out their call—from an associate pastor; through the pipeline to Bishop should they so choose.

*We want to hear from you....*

What intentional programs are happening in your conference to help move women through the pipeline? What ideas do you have to help move women through the leadership pipeline? We invite you to email us with your ideas at [info@gcsrw.org](mailto:info@gcsrw.org)

**Learn More:**

To read the more about the Male Champions initiative in Australia:

[http://www.mckinsey.com/Insights/Organization/Championing\\_gender\\_equality\\_in\\_Australia?cid=other-eml-alt-mkq-mck-oth-1502](http://www.mckinsey.com/Insights/Organization/Championing_gender_equality_in_Australia?cid=other-eml-alt-mkq-mck-oth-1502)

To access the "Women Called the Ministry" 6-week study:

<http://www.gcsrw.org/Resources/Curriculum.aspx>