

A current look at annual conference leaders

by Elaine Moy*



According to the denomination's most recent figures (2009), men hold 73% of the top staff leadership positions in the U.S. annual conferences, women hold 27%.

"Top positions" in an annual conference include bishops, directors of connectional ministries (DCM), district superintendents (DS) and treasurers. Women—who make up more than 50% of total United Methodist membership in the United States—are least represented as district superintendents (26% are women), while the highest number of women in top leadership are treasurers and directors of connection ministry (33% in each category).

As of 2009, the highest number of women in top-level conference positions was in the Western Jurisdiction (41%) and the least positions in Southeastern Jurisdiction (20%). Western Jurisdiction also has the highest percentage of clergywomen and laywomen serving in these leadership positions (36% and 5%). Southeastern Jurisdiction has the lowest percentage of clergywomen and laywomen serving in these leadership positions (17% and 3%).

The highest percentage of women bishops is in the Western Jurisdiction (50%) and the lowest percentage is in the South Central Jurisdiction (18%). The highest percentage of women DCMs is in the Northeastern Jurisdiction (46%) and the lowest is in the Western Jurisdiction (14%).

The largest percentage of women superintendents is in the Western Jurisdiction with 44%, and the lowest is in Southeastern Jurisdiction with 17%. And the largest percentage of women treasurers is in North Central Jurisdiction with 45% and the lowest is the South Central and Southeastern jurisdictions, which each have about 27% women as superintendents.

Conclusion

Does the face of top leadership in U.S. annual conferences represent who we are and who we want to be as The United Methodist Church? Do our conference leaders reflect the people of God whom we serve? For example, 19% of all the leadership positions held are by racial-ethnic persons, yet the United States has 35% racial-ethnic people. And 28% of all the positions are held by women; meanwhile 50% of the population is women. 92% of the leadership is clergy, while most of the denomination is laity.

If we want our leadership to represent the people they serve, we may need to change some of the ways we train, nurture, call, hire and elect our leaders. We need to be intentional in looking at clergy/lay, women/men, racial ethnic/white balances in our conference offices and committees. We need to look at how the existing structure helps or hinders us from becoming all we want to be.

Neither the United Methodist Church nor the wider society have an extensive track record of including women and racial ethnic persons in leadership. Valuing gender and racial inclusion as a part of our organization DNA is a relatively new addition. If our call is to nurture and making disciples of Christ to transform the world, we need to start close to home and broaden our concepts and diversify our pool of present and future leaders at all levels of church life.

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*** In 2005, laywomen were more likely to be conference treasurers than in other positions** (FLYER, Jan-Mar 06). Laywomen as treasurers were between 20%-50% of every jurisdiction. Laymen were between 63%-33%. Lay persons were 60%-88% of the treasurers.

*** In 2009, laywomen are now 33% of the treasurers (27% to 45% in each jurisdiction).** Laymen are 41% (18%-67% in each jurisdiction). Layperson are 74% of all the treasurers (from 47% in South Central to 100% in Northeastern).

*** Compared to 2005, two jurisdictions have increased clergywomen in the DCM position: Northeastern (25% to 46%) and South Central (7% to 31%).** Clergywomen in DCM position have lost ground in North Central (23% to 17%), Southeastern (27% to 19%) and West (17% to 14%).

For details on bishops in the UMC and other church leadership statistics, click [HERE](#).

Women by the numbers

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Bishops

There are 50 United Methodist bishops in the United States. Of those, 74% (36) are men and 26% (14) are women.

Women bishops range from 18% to 50% of the total number of bishops in their respective jurisdictions. (South Central has 18% women bishops and Western has 50%.) Even though the percentages may seem impressive, given that our first woman bishop was only elected in 1980, the church only has two or three women bishops in each jurisdiction.

Of the 14 women bishops, two are racial ethnic (Black and Hispanic). Racial-ethnic women bishops account for 15% of the women bishops and 4% of all bishops in the United States.

Men bishops account for 50% to 82% of the bishops in each jurisdiction (Western has 50% and South Central has 82%). The total number of bishops range from three to 10 bishops per jurisdiction. Of the 36 men bishops, 15 are racial ethnic (10 Black and five Asian). Racial- ethnic men bishops account for 42% of the men bishops and 30% of all the bishops in the United States.

The percentage of women bishops (26%) is higher than the percentage of United Methodist women elders (19%). The percentage of racial- ethnic women bishops (4%) is lower than the percentage of racial ethnic women clergy (10%). Of clergymen, 8% are racial ethnic, but they comprise 42% of the male bishops.

Why is there such a high percentage of racial-ethnic men bishops when they have such a low percentage of male clergy? What dynamics are at work while the Episcopal elections are being conducted? (Note: not all racial-ethnic groups are represented among the active U.S. bishops. Currently, there is no Native American or Pacific Islander bishops, no Asian female bishops, and no Latino/Hispanic male bishops.)

Other information

- ◆ 23% of conference treasurers are clergymen, but there are no clergywomen serving as treasurers.
- ◆ Most conference DCMs (90%) are mostly clergy.
- ◆ Clergy occupy 92% of the top conference leadership. (Bishops and superintendents are required by church law to be clergy).
- ◆ 19% of top U.S. conference leadership are racial ethnic people (14% men and 5% women).
- ◆ There is only 1 racial-ethnic laywoman in leadership (South Central Jurisdiction).
- ◆ There are no racial ethnic laymen in leadership positions in either the West and Southeastern Jurisdiction.

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