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**Lessons about sexuality from local church experiences**

—By James Newton Poling\*

“What did you learn about sexuality from your experiences in local churches?” This was the question we posed to 16 students at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary during the 2010 fall semester. The students from several generations represented European-American, African American and Asian cultures.

Professor Lallene Rector and I were surprised at the answers they gave. Most students said, “I did not learn anything from my congregation about sexuality except: ‘don’t do it.’” Many went on to say, “That was not enough to help me cope with what I was hearing from the media, internet and peers.”

Later one student said she learned that Christian faith was not relevant to issues of sexuality. “We were not allowed to speak on Sunday morning about what we did on Saturday night.”

On the other hand, most students did remember events in church that influenced their views of sexuality. One student remembered the gossip when a prominent female lay leader left the church after she had an affair and left her husband. Another student remembered an adult youth leader who tried to talk about sexuality, but did not connect with the teenagers’ world.

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**Kudos** to Commissioner Linda Bond, the new world leader of the Salvation Army. Bond is the third woman to hold this post since the organization was founded 146 years ago.

*The Flyer* is published monthly by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women in The United Methodist Church.

The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, an agency of the worldwide United Methodist Church acts as advocate, monitor and change agent to ensure the full participation and equality of women in the church.

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## Lessons: local church experiences

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One student told the story of how a gay member had been shunned until he left the church. Several students attended “Promise” workshops where they made abstinence pledges to wait for sex until marriage. One male student wore the ring he received at the workshop for two weeks and then threw it away. The result of this mixture of silence, gossip, and awkward attempts at indoctrination was confusion. When they hit college, most students confessed they had no theological basis for making decisions related to their sexuality.

The small class project confirmed what we read in *Sex and Soul: Juggling Sexuality, Spirituality, Romance, and Religion on America's College Campuses* by Donna Freitas (Oxford University Press, 2010). After interviewing dozens of college students on six university and college campuses, Freitas described two cultures facing undergraduates - the hook-up culture and the abstinence culture. In the hook-up culture, young people have sex first and then decide whether to date. The result is a total disconnect between sex and Christian faith. In the abstinence culture, virtue means waiting for intercourse until after marriage. For some students this includes waiting until marriage for kissing and fondling. But for most students, anything short of intercourse is possible. As Bill Clinton famously said, “I did not have sex with that woman.” One result of both cultures is violence against women. Whether women take responsibility for abstaining, or whether they join in the hook-up culture, women have few resources to cope with various kinds of pressure, abuse, and violence.

“What can we do to improve the quality of conversation about sexuality in local congregations?”

This was a hard question for our students to answer. They were keenly aware of the hyper-sexualized culture in which we live and the inadequacy of most attempts to address this problem. We read important books such as Miguel De La Torres' *A Lily Among the Thorns: Imagining a New Christian Sexuality* (Jossey Bass, 2007); Margaret Farley's *A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (NY: Continuum, 2008); and Stanley Grenz's *Sexual Ethics* (Westminster John Knox, 1999).

Students also sampled curriculum from some of the major denominations including United Methodist, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist, Presbyterian, Episcopal and found helpful ideas.

We concluded in our last session that there are no easy answers to the questions about sexuality in congregations. Today most young people are not receiving competent information and faith perspectives on sexuality that will help them cope with the United States culture. There is no substitute for well-trained leaders who have survived their own struggles and know how to talk with teenagers and young adults. Until there is a lively and respectful conversation among adults in local congregations, most young people will be left to figure sexuality out for themselves.

*\*James Newton Poling is professor of pastoral theology, care and counseling at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill.*

## WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

### Maternity leave: 18 days

By Elaine Moy\*

"[General church agencies] will provide leave for newborn or adoption childcare leave in the amount of 18 days." (Adopted Feb 2011, Personnel Policies and Procedures of the General Agencies of the United Methodist Church.)



**Prior to Feb 2011**, the paid time off included:

- ▶ Mothers who gave birth were able to take medical leave (with a doctor's note) and vacation days. (Mothers who gave birth DID NOT have a paid maternity leave.)
- ▶ Parents of children who are adopted were able to use Adoption Leave which was 22 days of paid leave plus vacation days.
- ▶ Fathers were able to take Paternity Leave which was 22 days of paid leave plus vacation days.

**Post Feb 2011**, the paid time off includes:

- ▶ Mothers who gave birth have 18 days paid time off, medical leave (with doctor's note) and vacation days.
- ▶ Parents of children who are adopted have 18 days paid time off and vacation days.
- ▶ Fathers have 18 days paid time off and vacation days.

I had both my children while working for GCSRW and I would have appreciated the 18 days paid time off to be with them. Instead, I had my medical leave, vacation days and then family leave (which was unpaid.) My husband also took time off from his work to stay with them after I came back to work.

The change is long overdue and much needed. In the past, some parents didn't take time to stay home with their new child (or children) but now it is more common and encouraged for both father and mother to stay home in the beginning. Details of the policy is in the Personnel Policies and Procedures of the General Agencies of the United Methodist Church.)

*\*Elaine Moy of Chicago is assistant general secretary for finance and administration for the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.*

## SEXUAL ETHICS

### When seminaries are serious about sexual ethics

By Darryl W. Stephens\*



United Methodist seminaries are getting serious about sexual ethics. Under GCSRW's leadership, faculty and administrators have developed recommendations for a rigorous program of ministerial readiness regarding professional ethics, sexual ethics, healthy boundaries and self-care.

GCSRW will propose to General Conference in 2012 that the following goals, core competencies and content areas become standard and intentional aspects of United Methodist seminary and course of study education:

**Pedagogical Goals:** Ministerial leaders should ...

- understand healthy interpersonal boundaries as integral to enabling the trust necessary for ministry;
- recognize sexual ethics in ministry as an issue of appropriate use of power and avoidance of abuse rather than an issue of "sexual morality";
- understand the importance of professional ethics, including one's own denominational policies and expectations;
- learn the role of judicatories in prevention and response to clergy misconduct;
- become knowledgeable about human sexuality, one's own sexual self, and how to deal with sexual feelings that may arise for congregants and vice versa;
- appreciate how sexual integrity contributes to spiritual wholeness and that this is vital to ministerial formation and personal health;
- engage in scriptural and theological study about all of the above.

**Core Competencies:** Ministerial candidates should ...

- practice healthy life-choices and work/life balance;
- be sexually self-aware;
- comfortable talking about issues of sexuality;
- develop skills to provide pastoral care and worship on sexuality issues;
- be committed to sexual justice in the congregation and in society at large.

**Content Areas:** theology of power, privilege and abuse; human sexuality; misconduct in ministry; pastoral care; best practices of ministry.

These recommendations are the result of a two-year development process. GCSRW launched the seminary curriculum project in 2009 with a survey and invitation to all 13 United Methodist seminaries. Over the past two years, GCSRW has worked closely with six seminaries. Faculty and administrators from Candler, Garrett-Evangelical, Gammon and Iliff, along with expert consultants and staff from GBHEM and UMPACT, participated in a full-day workshop in 2010 to develop these guidelines. Candler and Garrett-Evangelical offered pilot courses (three semester hours) in sexual ethics for ministry in 2010. Wesley and St. Paul hosted faculty discussions facilitated by GCSRW about this curriculum project, its goals and objectives. We continue to welcome faculty from each United Methodist seminary to partner in this effort by contacting [dstephens@gcsr.org](mailto:dstephens@gcsr.org).

As this program is fully implemented, GCSRW will work with each United Methodist seminary to develop intentional strategies for meeting these objectives. Detailed information on this curriculum project can be found [HERE](#).

*\*Darryl Stephens is assistant general secretary of sexual ethics for GCSRW.*

## GENERAL CONFERENCE

### Save the dates: General Conference

General Conference is April 24-May 4, 2012 at the Tampa (Fla.) Convention Center. Be sure to look for more information in upcoming issues of the *Flyer*. Also, you may visit [umc.org](http://umc.org) for General Conference news and updates.



## DEACONESS SERIES

### Called to serve: a brief history of the Methodist deaconess movement

By Myka Kennedy Stephens\*

*NOTE: This is one of a series of three stories that explains the importance of deaconesses.*



#### Early deaconesses

Amidst the squalor of the poorest immigrant neighborhoods in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Chicago, she walked neatly attired in her street-length black skirt, black shirtwaist and black bonnet with white ties. She educated young children, attended the sick and launched urban ministries. This young woman, full of love and compassion, called to be with and minister to those whom society had overlooked, was one of the first deaconesses of the former Methodist Episcopal Church.

The first generation of Methodist deaconesses who served at the turn of the last century lived in communal homes, chose not to marry, received a modest allowance, and wore a prescribed uniform of black dress and bonnet. These women, called by God and set apart for ministry, served in positions acceptable for their gender at that time: nurses, teachers, social workers and pastors' assistants."

Creating a place in the church's structure, polity for women called to social service ministries took many years of diligent work convincing skeptics and making a case for training and educating women, particularly middle-class women, to do work outside of their own homes. Looking to Paul's commendation of Phoebe in Romans 16:1-2, Methodist women claimed the deaconess tradition in 1872, inspired by Theodore Fliedner who first restored the deaconess office to the Lutheran Church in Germany in 1836. Critics of the growing deaconess movement feared the similarities between deaconesses and nuns, and were reluctant to condone the formation of Protestant nuns.

Lucy Rider Meyer, founder of the Chicago Training School for City, Home and Foreign Missions, initiated Methodist deaconess work as an experiment. In the summer of 1887, Meyer took a group of her students into the city's immigrant neighborhoods for house visits. Later, she joined by Isabella Thoburn, (the first single woman commissioned to serve in a foreign mission field by the Women's Foreign Mission Society) to mentor and train this unofficial band of deaconesses.

At the 1888 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Bishop James Mills Thoburn, brother of Isabella Thoburn, spoke in favor of legislation to create a denominational office of deaconess. He proved to be a persuasive and powerful ally for the deaconess movement as an all-male assembly of voting delegates approved the office of deaconess that spring. By October 1888, the first three deaconesses were consecrated and licensed by the Rock River Annual Conference (which included Chicago and much of what is now the Northern Illinois Annual Conference).

The deaconess office grew rapidly within Methodism. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, created a deaconess office in 1902, as did the Methodist Protestant Church in 1908. Training schools, much like the one Meyer founded in Chicago, sprang up in other cities across the United States. When those three denominations merged in 1939 to become the Methodist Church, there were more than 1,000 deaconesses serving around the world.

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## INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

### "What I meant was..."

#### A lexicon for inclusive language

By Kim Coffing\*



Sometimes we need a little help in how we talk *to* one another and how we talk *about* one another. We may be so unaware and accustomed to the words and phrases we've heard and used throughout our lives that we have trouble "hearing" the biases infused in what we're saying.

For example, we may have said something like, "Everyone has a right to his opinion." Consequently, who has a right to an opinion? And we may have said, "Who's manning the booth?" Who do you expect to find at the booth?

Unintentional discriminatory word choices that make exclusivity or promotes a sense of hierarchy in our "reality framing" is often emotionally charged when reflected back to us. Realizing we are entrenched in a society that "normalizes" placing one group of people below others, contributes to negative social stereotyping and generally galvanizing our defenses of "what we meant" rather than opening us to hear the impact of what we said.

For United Methodists, "Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the church, the community, and the world; therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. The services of worship of every local church of The United Methodist Church shall be open to all persons." (Para. 139 *The Book of Discipline, 2008*)

Hearing how else to frame our intent is one place to begin. A helpful way to begin is to provide a lexicon that juxtaposes words we may have learned to use with other word choices that may better bridge our intent with the connecting impact we hope to make when communicating. Below is a "beginning" set of "general" words used in USA daily life.

General Inclusive Language Lexicon*	
Avoid using...	Use as Appropriate...
Actress	Actor, performer
Anchorman	Anchor, anchorperson
Authoress	Author
Average or common man	Ordinary people/person, typical worker
Bachelor or bachelorette	Single (or unmarried) man/woman
Brotherhood (unless only men)	Community, unity
Businessman	Executive, manager, entrepreneur, business person
Cameraman	Camera operator, photographer, videographer
Career girl	Professional woman
Chairman, chairwoman	Chair (for both genders) or chairperson
Cleaning lady/woman, maid	Housekeeper, housecleaner, office cleaner
Clergyman, clergywoman	Clergy, minister, pastor
Coed	Student
Congressman	Member of Congress, Representative, Legislator, Senator

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## Deaconesses

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**Deaconess in traditional garb**

In the generations that followed, the deaconess office adapted with changing times. They left behind communal homes after World War I in favor of women's residence hotels. Their iconic uniform also lost its appeal in that era.

Financial support for deaconesses changed over time to provide pension and medical benefits. Even the image of deaconesses as solely unmarried women gave way in 1959, when the church agreed to allow deaconesses to continue their appointments after they married.

According to the General Board of Global Ministries Deaconess Program Office in New York, N.Y., there are more than 155 active deaconesses serving in the United States. Among these 155, three are deployed overseas. One is in South Africa, one is in the Philippines and one is in Somoa.

One constant remains from the beginnings of the Methodist deaconess movement: the commitment of love, justice and service. For United Methodist deaconesses in active service today, the words of the deaconess motto continue to resonate: "I serve neither for gratitude nor reward but from gratitude and love; my reward is that I may serve."

*\*A freelance writer and United Methodist deaconess serving in the Northern Illinois Conference, Myka Kennedy Stephens is founder and developer of Mission: Information, an online resource for library and information ministries.*

**Lexicon** (continued from page 7)

Councilman, councilwoman	Councilmember
Craftsman	Craftsperson, artisan, crafter
Draftsman	Drafter, drafting technician
Fellow worker	Colleague, co-worker, peer
Fireman	Firefighter
Fisherman	Angler
Forefathers	Ancestors, precursors, forebears
Foreman	Supervisor
Founding fathers	The founders, pioneers
Girl (over 18)	Woman, young woman
Gal or girl Friday	Assistant or secretary
Gentlemen's agreement	Personal agreement, informal contract
Great men in history	Great figures in history, people who make history, historical figures
Guys, you guys	Folks, friends, you all
Heroine	Hero
Hostess	Host
Hula girl	Hula dancer
Insurance man	Insurance agent
Lady doctor	Doctor, physician
Layman	Layperson, lay, laity, lay member
Mailman, postman	Mail carrier, letter carrier, postal worker
Male nurse	Nurse
To man	To staff, to run, to operate
Man and his world	World history, history of peoples, humans and their world
Man-hours	Work hours, staff hours, hours worked, total hours
Manhunt	A hunt for ...
Mankind	Humanity, human race, human beings, people, human family, humankind
Man-made	Artificial, hand-made, of human origin, synthetic, manufactured, crafted, machine made
Manned flight	Piloted flight
Man-on-the-street	Ordinary person, ordinary citizen, average voter, average person
Manpower	Work force, human resources, labor force, human energy, personnel, workers
Man's achievement	Human achievements
Man-sized job	Big or difficult job, requiring exceptional abilities
Men of science	Scientists

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## Lexicon

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Middleman	Go-between, liaison, agent
Mr. Chairman! Madam Chairwoman!	Chair! (for both sexes)
One-man band or show	Soloist, performer, artists, individual, individual show
Oriental	Asian, Asian-American or specify ethnicity if appropriate
Poetess	Poet
Policeman	Police officer
Repairman	Repairer, repair person
Right hand man	Assistant, helper, second in command
Rise of man	Rise of the human race or humanity, rise of civilization, rise of culture
Salesman	Sales person, sales representative, salesclerk, seller, agent
Salesmen	Sales personnel, sales staff, salespeople/person
Showman	Performer
Spinster	Single (or unmarried) woman
Spokesman	Representative, spokesperson
Statesman	Official, diplomat
Tradesman	Shopkeeper, trader, merchant, entrepreneur, artisan
Weatherman	Forecaster, weathercaster
Woman lawyer	Lawyer
Working man	Workers, typical worker
Workman	Worker, laborer, employee
Workman like	Competent

### What words would you add to this growing lexicon?

\*From the Media Task Force of the Honolulu County Committee on the Status of Women whose mission is to promote gender equity in the media. Originally adapted from *Women, Men and the Changing Language* revision 1985.

\*Kim Coffing is assistant general secretary for education and advocacy for GCSRW.