

## UMC District Superintendents II: Race & Ethnicity

We must also attend to the race and ethnicity of district superintendents if we hope to gain an understanding of representation among their ranks and ensure that we do not perpetuate discriminatory attitudes in their appointment. These data show that our church leadership remains largely white: 79% white, in fact. While those identifying with other race and ethnicity categories have made progress since our denomination systemically and overtly discriminated in its ordination practices – in some regions of the country more than others – the percentage of district superintendents who identify as non-white remains at 21%. At more detailed examination of district superintendents' race and ethnicity reveals that one non-white group, those identifying as Black, comprise two-thirds of all racial diversity among those holding this leadership position. Some of these statistics likely arise from demographic realities within the UMC in the United States, which remains majority white, but under-representation of other racial and ethnic groups nonetheless remains.

Note that any percentages that appear confounding are due to rounding. For example, although there are non-zero percentages for multi-racial in two jurisdictions, when included in overall calculations those identifying as multi-racial make up 0.47% of the DS population in the U.S. – a total that rounds to 0%.

In the jurisdictions, racial and ethnic representation among district superintendents remains fairly consistent with the overall percentages seen above, with two exceptions. First, the South Central jurisdiction has an even higher percentage of white district superintendents, 85%. There, although the percentage of Native American district superintendents exceeds that of the U.S., all other identity groups make up the same or a smaller percentage than found in the overall statistics. In fact, there are only half as many Black district superintendents by percentage than found in the U.S. overall, and less than half the Asian district superintendents.

On the other hand, of the Northeastern conference's district superintendents, 70% identify as white and 30% identify with another race or ethnicity. Looking more closely, we see that those 30% are spread among Asian (9%), Black (17%), and Hispanic (4%). In keeping with the overall statistics, then, the majority of non-white district superintendents in the Northeastern conference are Black. Conversely, the percentage of Asian district superintendents triples that of the overall statistics, and Hispanic district superintendents double the overall percentage.

In only one other jurisdiction – the Western – are multiple racial categories a larger percentage than found in the overall statistics. There, 8% of district superintendents are Asian, 6% are Pacific Islander, and 3% are Multi-Racial. Compare those percentages to those of district superintendents in the U.S. overall – 3% Asian, 1% Pacific Islander, and 0% Multi-Racial – and we notice a very different distribution of district superintendents across race and ethnicity identities in this region of the country. Notice, too, that only in this jurisdiction are those identifying as Black (6%) not the largest non-white group, likely a variation due to different regional demographics in the UMC. Even so, the breakdown between white and minority district superintendents in the Western jurisdiction remains consistent with the overall U.S. (78% West vs. 79% overall).

Confronted with these data, questions similar to those provoked by the gender statistics arise. Are variations in racial and ethnic representation dictated by geographic demographics? Does continued discrimination against people of color, whether systemic racism or individual prejudice, play a role in the preponderance of white district superintendents across the U.S.? For example, differential access to seminary education, cultural norms within congregations that make non-white individuals feel less welcome, and more might play a role in sustaining such a large white majority across geographic regions. Part of the explanation may also be found in the tendency of different racial and ethnic groups to worship together, segregated from others – but we must continue to ask ourselves what role both individual and institutional factors within our control might play in perpetuating that reality, not to mention how our common Creator might view such habits. As we meet an increasingly racially diverse U.S. population, how is the UMC preparing its leadership and nurturing the diversity that already exists within its ranks of leaders, clergy, and laity alike?

In the end, as with our common life, our church is at its best when all are welcome at the table: should there be any exception in the makeup of our Annual Conference leaders? What do these demographics suggest to outsiders about our church, as well as to those who aspire to leadership positions from within it?