

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

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

In January, Women by the Numbers looked at the status of women in the pipeline to senior management in government and corporate sectors. Last month, Women by the Numbers looked at women in the pipeline to leadership within our denomination's local churches and Annual Conferences. It provided some intentional measures both men and women could take to remove barriers experienced by women interested in more senior leadership positions. In the conclusion to this "Beyond the Stained-Glass Ceiling" series, Women by the Numbers looks at the status and role of women within the United Methodist denomination's agencies and offers concrete examples that agencies are intentionally taking to ensure that women are equipped to lead and go beyond the stained-glass ceiling.

To review, of 12 million United Methodist church members, 54% are women, with females leading from the pulpit only 22% of the time. Church members see a woman leading their districts 27% of the time, and a female bishop leading their annual conference 27% of the time. Many of the 50 largest churches have women on their pastoral staff, but only one lists a woman as a senior pastor. Changing the culture of the local church will take time and intentional actions by both men and women. What is the status of women in the pipeline to senior leadership within our general agencies?

Among the leadership of United Methodist general agencies, 5 of the 12 General Secretaries are women: Susan Henry-Crowe of the General Board of Church and Society, Kim Cape of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Barbara Boigegrain from the General Board of Pension and Health, Erin Hawkins with the General Commission on Religion and Race, and Dawn Wiggins Hare of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. These women represent 42% of the leadership in general agencies. (Women by the Numbers will be looking at staffing of general agencies in a future article.) Are the general agencies assisting women to move through the pipeline to senior level leadership? Are the general agencies-making intentional actions to hire, retain, and promote women? If so, how? And if not, what are some intentional actions they might take to ensure the women can lead beyond the stained-glass ceiling?

#### **How do general agencies act to hire, retain and promote women?**

The practices at the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) serve as examples of intentional actions taken to ensure women are equally represented in the recruitment and hiring process of the agency. For example, Elaine Moy, Assistant General Secretary, reports that, when there is an open position, the agency's leaders make sure that the pool of candidates consists of both men and women before making the selection of who to invite for an interview. In addition, they broaden their search by not relying solely on word of mouth or applicants they may know. This practice allows for a more diverse applicant pool of candidates with views different from current staff and leadership.

The Leadership Academy at the General Board of Global Ministries is one example of an intentional program aimed to develop staff for further leadership. Staff members may apply to participate in the Leadership Academy. Agency leadership selects 24 male and female staff members who show immense leadership potential to participate in the 2-3 day training event. In the Leadership Academy, participants identify their leadership styles and values, develop active listening and communication skills, and define what leadership means to them. After the initial intensive course, each participant is assigned a mentor from the cabinet with whom they meet monthly for individual coaching and mentorship. Alumni of the Leadership Academy have gone on to take senior positions on staff at the General Board of Global Ministries and with other organizations. These leaders have clearly exhibited the skills they needed to lead at a higher level in the pipeline.

### What are some intentional acts that agencies have taken to retain female leaders?

One of the key issues to why senior leadership positions are less likely to be held by women than men is the retention rate. Female employees often do not stay within an agency long enough for them to move through the pipeline. In the McKinsey & Company research study “Unlocking the full potential of women at work,” researchers looked at the status of women being developed, retained, and advanced within 60 leading companies in corporate America. Research showed that while many women were hired, rarely did they stay long enough to move through the pipeline to the “C-suite” of leadership with the organization. The researchers identified four barriers to the advancement of women: “structural obstacles, lifestyle choices, institutional mind-sets, and individual mind-sets.” Women who remained in the pipeline stayed because they were passionate about their work and saw it as a way to make a difference. Some who left cited the lifestyle choice women sometimes face of being both the breadwinner and the sole caregiver of their family. Corporations are now taking proactive steps to address these obstacles, and our United Methodist general agencies seem to be following suit.

For example, the General Board of Global Ministries recently implemented a “bring your baby to work” policy. Under this policy, new mothers could return to the office setting earlier than they might do otherwise because they are permitted to bring their infants to work. The policy required that the infant not disrupt the working environment for other staff members. Having a baby in the office actually increases morale all around and allows women to come back from maternity leave sooner. Many parents can return to work, fully focused, because they are not separated from and worried about their infant. Since the policy was implemented, at least one executive level staff person has partaken of her rights under the policy, allowing her to return to the office and continue the development of a major program initiative of the agency almost seamlessly from where she left off before the birth of her child.

In addition, an executive at the General Board of Discipleship does not allow her work ethic to outweigh her commitment to her family, and is honest about this with her superiors. She told her new boss, “I will give 150 percent at work, but that my family is my number one priority” and further explained that “there was not one example for me to follow around the leadership table—no one had children living at home.” She was grateful when her superior replied, “you bring diversity to the table that we don’t have. We need to hear the voice of mothers with young children.” This example suggests that leadership of our agencies are both acknowledging and addressing the unique needs of women in both developing

them as leaders, and providing them with the flexibility needed for those who want or need to be caregivers as well as breadwinners.

A female General Secretary of another agency, who has grown children, when asked why she accepted her position in leadership and why she stays, mentioned the need for the ability “to look towards the future with excitement and hope.” Further she says, “Being a leader means continuing to listen deeply and look towards the future while remembering the past. My work at the agency has been rich and continues to help grow my passion for the neighbor both across the street and around the world.”

Women stay in leadership of the United Methodist general agencies for a variety of reasons. Those in leadership and those with potential to lead stay in the pipeline of our agencies, not only because of the intentional approaches being taken by the agencies to retain and train women, but because they see their work as an important continuation of the history of our denomination, and as a personal vocational calling. As long as they are learning and growing, and being supported in their development as leaders through agency initiatives, they remain passionate and dedicated to the work and to the future of our denomination.

In conclusion, it seems our agencies are taking creative approaches in their initiatives for placing and retaining women in the pipeline to senior leadership positions. This is only the beginning of our work to include both men and women in the senior leadership. Creative intentionality is the key to initiating and sustaining a cultural shift in our denomination towards an environment accepting and celebratory of women in leadership. Both men and women need to be intentional to address gender, no matter where we are in the connectional system of the UMC.

For more information:

For the McKinsey and Company study:

<http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/womenreportnew.pdf>

To read more about the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women and its leadership:

<http://www.gcsrw.org/>

To read more about the General Board of Discipleship and its leadership:

<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/>

To read more about the General Board of Global Ministries and its leadership: [www.umcmmission.org](http://www.umcmmission.org)

Tell us what you think:

Are their women in leadership in your local church, conference, or at a board or agency that you look up to as a woman lower in the pipeline?

Why do you stay in the pipeline? What could your church, conference, and/or agency do to ensure you stay in the pipeline, committed to the work and mission of the denomination?

What are examples of intentional actions taken by entities within our denomination connection that help retain women in the pipeline to senior management?

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