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THIS MONTH



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Why do women derail one another?

By Jane DuBose*

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, catalyst and monitor to ensure the full participation and equality of women in the church.



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For more than 50 years, women have served as clergy in the United Methodist Church and its predecessor denominations. Today there are nearly 11,000 female pastors serving, representing some 22 percent of the clergy workforce. The United Methodist Church may have one of the best records for female advancement, but that doesn't mean our denomination has gotten beyond gender bias and stereotypes.

Decades after women were granted full rights as clergy in the UMC, there is still at least one local church each year in the Virginia Conference--where Bishop Charlene Kammerer is episcopal leader--that will not accept a female pastor. "I know from reality that sexism still exists. It is deeply embedded in the bone marrow," she says.

Our church's unique position as a pioneer on behalf of women creates an opportunity for us to face the truth that sexism is alive and well and that women derail other women as much as--or more than--men damage women.

That reality was voiced many times at the 2007 and 2009 Shared History, Shared Faith workshops, sponsored by the

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Endowment Fund will expand GCSRW global work as we: advocate for women; identify discriminatory policies and practices; prevent inequities; develop women as leaders; raise awareness of issues and concerns of women; and much, much more.

Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference. By naming myths, stereotypes and issues that make their lives difficult, both clergywomen and laywomen were able to understand each other's paths much more intimately, says S. Kim Coffing, associate general secretary of GCSRW and facilitator of the events.

Coffing says one of the takeaways for her from the workkshops was the speed at which the vulnerabilities of clergywomen surfaced—much faster than that of laywomen.

[READ MORE](#)

[<<Back to Page 1](#)[<<Previous Page](#) [Next Page>>](#)

Why women derail one another

(continued from page 2)

"We often aren't aware of how we undermine one another and how we expose our sexism to one another. This harms the body of Christ," Coffing says.

Female pastors continue to face obstacles men might not, such as concerns about their safety, their work-family balance and their congregants questioning their qualifications. "Somehow, when you're a woman, if you're a bad pastor, it's *because* you're a woman," says the Rev. Lauren Lay, who is moving to full-time arts ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. "Whether a male pastor is good or bad, his gender isn't an issue."

"Older women often talked to me like I was their daughter," says the Rev. Pat Meyers, who was ordained as a deacon in the Detroit Conference in 1977. "There was no respect for me as their pastor. They would say, 'I'm coming in to tell you this because I have a daughter your age.'"

Kammerer says she witnesses clergywomen pitted against laywomen in situations that can get to the point of "vicious." Even still, the dialogue is much more respectful than it was just a few years ago.



Charlene Kammerer

In every conference years ago, district superintendents would ask, "Would you receive a female pastor?" Now, that question is not asked. Ironically, however, the conflicts between female clergy and lay leaders may have been able to flourish because female lay leaders have gained power at about the same rate as female clergy. Women occupy important volunteer posts at local churches, from administrative chairs to local finance committee chairs and managers of property and trust funds.

The same trend of women breaking through glass ceilings is occurring in the secular workplace, and increasingly women are the biggest obstacles to other women's successes, studies show. That's why it's critical to verbalize the issues, to say them out loud, so that all parties recognize the subtle things they may be doing to each other, Coffing says. "What do we need to do to go behind the words" was one of the themes of the Idaho-Oregon workshops.

The Rev. Varlyna D. Wright, interim director of connectional ministries for the Greater New Jersey Conference, says many people do not challenge others who use sexist language or actions. Wright says she's often the only one pointing out a gender or racial inequality at meetings and frankly tires of carrying the load.



Varlyna Wright

"After a while, if you are the only one doing it, it becomes a burden," she says. The conference is trying to obtain a grant to offer training on religion and racism through the Commission on Religion and Race. The workshop would allow participants to break into groups by race and gender and come to deeper understandings of where church members fall short.



Rita Nakashima Brock

The Rev. Rita Nakashima Brock, director of Faith Voices for the Common Good in Oakland, Calif., says, "Each of us has a responsibility to reprogram our biases." Brock, who was a coordinator of the 2010 Truth Commission on Conscience in War held at Riverside Church in New York City, says resolving workplace or church conflict could take lessons from truth commissions, which seek to help restore individuals from the harm they've experienced.

She says "the rest of us" may have to hold accountable those who have caused harm. Wright believes women need to get out of the mindset of "limiting ourselves." She says her jurisdiction recently elected five bishops and one of them was a woman. "Why couldn't there have been two, or three or even four? We limit ourselves sometimes in thinking in ways that men do not."

--Jane DuBose is a freelance writer living in Nashville, Tenn. A portion of this story was reported by Erik Alsgaard, freelance writer and pastor of St.

Ignace (Mich) UMC.

[<<Back to Page 1](#)[<<Previous Page](#) [Next Page>>](#)

2

The Flyer • August 2010 • Issue 8 • Volume 41 • www.gcsrw.org

[<<Back to Page 1](#)[<<Previous Page](#) [Next Page>>](#)

WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

Economic downturn's impact on general agency employment

by Craig This*



United Methodist general agencies felt the impact of the 2008-2009 economic downturn in the United States, according to audits by the General Commission on Religion and Race and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

To view Tables 1, 2 and 3, and to read more information, click [HERE](#).

The agencies dropped from 1,751 employees in 2008 to 1,557 in 2009, a loss of 194 jobs (11% of workforce). Of the 194 job losses, 190 (98%) were laity and 4 (2%) were clergy (Table 1 [HERE](#)).

The data were self-reported by the agencies using an online collection form created by GCSRW. Data were aggregated into Categories 1-3 (executives/directors, professionals, managers/administrators) and Categories 4-6 (technicians, administrative and clerical support, service/maintenance workers).

Racial/Ethnic Changes

Whites, the largest racial/ethnic group, lost 109 positions, a 9% decrease. Still, with 1,003 persons, whites represent 64% of the total number of general agency employees in 2009. The number of racial/ethnic employees fell from 639 to 554, a loss of 85 persons (13%). Despite these losses, racial/ethnic groups continued to make-up 36% of the employees in 2009 as they did in 2008. African-Americans (59) and Hispanics (17) lost the greatest numbers among the racial/ethnic groups (89% of racial/ethnic job losses). African-American men and women made up 32% of the lay reductions (61 persons). Racial/ethnic clergywomen gained 3 positions, while racial/ethnic clergymen lost 3 positions.

Male/Female Changes

A total of 118 laymen and one clergyman lost their positions as did 72 laywomen and three clergywomen. Racial/ethnic women (26% of the workforce) lost 43 positions (60% of the job losses suffered by laywomen and 57% of job losses for all women). White males (22% of the workforce) lost 76 positions (22% of the total workforce in 2008).

Executives, professionals, managers

The number of persons employed in categories 1-3 (executives/directors, professionals, managers/administrators) dropped from 898 in 2008 to 857 in 2009, a loss of 41 positions. Interestingly, clergywomen and laywomen actually gained positions in these three categories (see Table 2 [HERE](#)).

Racial/ethnic persons made up 56% of the personnel losses in these categories with 23 positions eliminated. African-Americans lost 13 and Hispanics lost 9 for a total of 22 or 96% of the racial/ethnic losses; Native Americans gained two. As a result of the reductions, 55% of all employees are now in Categories 1-3 in 2009 compared to 51% in 2008.

Technicians, administrative support, service workers

Positions in Categories 4-6 (technicians, administrative and clerical support, service/maintenance workers) dropped from 853 to 700, a loss of 153 posts (79% of the jobs eliminated between 2008 and 2009 (see Table 3 [HERE](#)). Laywomen and laymen each lost 76 positions and one clergyman lost a job in these categories. Sixty-two racial/ethnic persons (32 laywomen and 30 laymen) lost positions; 46 of these were African Americans.

Conclusion

Eleven percent of the general agency's workforce was reduced after the economic downturn of 2008-2009. Despite these losses, racial/ethnic persons remained at 36% of overall representation. However, one must ask why racial/ethnic women (26% of the workforce) made up 22% of the total job losses and 60% of the job losses for laywomen?

[<<Back to Page 1](#)[<<Previous Page](#)[Next Page>>](#)

Study: Fear of confrontation, ignorance of warnings put churches at risk

by Darryl W. Stephens*

"Sexual abuse couldn't happen in *my* church. We're so *nice*." This common denial is one of six characteristics of churches at risk of sexual misconduct by a ministerial leader. A major academic study by Baylor University offers insight into how clergy sexual misconduct happens and suggests strategies for preventing it.

The Baylor study reveals six common characteristics of congregations in which clergy sexual misconduct occurred (see sidebar). Church members ignored warning signs and were not able to recognize and name the boundary violations when ministerial leaders acted inappropriately.

Church members avoided confrontation about suspected boundary violations. Private communication, such as email and cell phones, made it difficult for others to observe their pastor's behavior.

Ministerial leaders who kept their own calendar, maintained irregular office hours, and didn't report to anyone on a daily basis became isolated and unaccountable in their behavior. Ministerial leaders often found themselves in dual relationships in a congregation, causing conflicts of interest and confusion of boundaries.

The same trust that enabled spiritual intimacy in ministry also rendered people vulnerable to predation by ministerial leaders.

These problematic social characteristics can be reduced but not eliminated entirely. Trust enables the intimacy necessary for effective pastoral care. The sacred trust of ministry is that clergy will act in the best interests of those whom they serve. We cannot nor would we want to eliminate trust in the sanctuary. Likewise, the multiple roles in which clergy find themselves cannot be eliminated entirely. Especially in rural areas, pastors are a part of a community that lives, works and plays together. How a clergy person balances personal and professional roles and the inevitable friendships that develop is a matter of self-care and safety for all. We would not want a pastor whom we could not trust or who allowed no friendships with congregants. We need pastors who can clearly communicate appropriate boundaries and limits.

We can help to prevent sexual misconduct by creating a culture of professional expectations and accountability. This effort begins with education of the public and church goers, in particular. When our culture promotes an awareness of misconduct as an abuse of power, not as an affair, people are less likely to ignore warning signs of inappropriate behavior by persons in the helping professions. When church members understand the use and abuse of professional power, they are better able to recognize and name misconduct when they see it.

Education must be complemented by clear policies, rules, and role expectations. Clergy need appropriate oversight and support, as well as policies that can protect them from unnecessary multiple and conflicting roles. State laws that define clergy sexual misconduct as a crime will also help the church prevent misconduct in its midst.

For more prevention information, go to www.umsexualethics.org or go to [Baylor School of Social Work](#).

—Darryl W. Stephens is assistant general secretary of sexual ethics and advocacy for GCSRW.

Social characteristics of congregations in which clergy sexual misconduct occurred:

- Warning signs were ignored
- Confrontation about violations was avoided
- Private communication was used (email, cell phone)
- Pastor was isolated and unaccountable in behavior (kept own calendar and worked irregular hours)
- Pastor held multiple roles, blurred boundaries
- Trust was abused

Prevention strategies:

- Educate people about possible abuse of power in ministry.
- Teach laity about the role of power in the workplace, congregation and family.
- Provide ministerial leaders with clear policies and role expectations.
- Define clergy sexual misconduct as illegal, not just immoral.

[<<Back to Page 1](#)[<<Previous Page](#)[Next Page>>](#)

[<<Back to Page 1](#)[<<Previous Page](#)

Women friendly churches

Two small, rural churches encourage women in leadership and mission

by Kristin Knudson*



Highland Mills UMC in Mountainville, N.Y., hosts a breakfast to raise money for Haiti.

The Highland Mills and Mountainville UMCs in southern New York are a yoked parish served by the Rev. Darlene E. R. Resling. Both small, rural congregations have been serving the area for over 150 years.

Highland Mills has an average worship attendance of 55 and a membership of 125 (and 15 children). On Sunday morning at Mountainville, you're likely to find

approximately 30 worshipers from their membership of more than 80 (and six children.)



Volunteers participate in the blood drive at Mountainville (N.Y.) UMC.

Resling says both churches are "women-friendly" for welcoming her as a pastor and for supporting female church leadership, including a woman lay leader and a woman web site administrator.

Both congregations are intentional about inviting women to participate in weekly and ongoing activities. A mid-day service of praise and worship held each Wednesday especially welcomes women and their children. Additionally women from the congregations participate in the local Habitat for Humanity "Women's Build" and feel included in all Habitat activities.

Women are leaders in missions and local outreach for both churches and the Highland Mills church has a strong Women's Guild which supports all areas of the church and connects with the Mountainville church in supporting new mission projects, such as the Nothing But Nets program and Habitat for Humanity.

During Sunday morning worship, Resling intentionally tries to avoid referring to God as "he" but rather to use a variety of names for God. She's also written original lyrics for hymns that reflect the inclusive nature of God. And the ethics policy of the New York Annual Conference was studied intentionally by congregational leaders and the information was shared so that all understand the policy regarding safe sanctuaries within the church.



Mountainville and Highland Mills UMCs worship together on the Hudson River in New York.

While the congregations don't have specific programs for identifying women called to ordained ministry, Resling says, "Since I am a second-career pastor, I am very alert to women of all ages who may be gifted for ordained ministry. I listen attentively to their God-given visions and try to connect them with a place in the church where their calling may be met."

Resling is very pleased with how the churches' men's groups and women's groups support each other in the work that they do both locally and globally. "They are constantly listening and encouraging each other and that ignites a lot of creative partnerships," Resling notes. The women supported the Men's Ministry breakfast that sent aid to Haiti and the men supported the Women's Ministry by serving their brunch last year. Both groups coordinated the church-wide yard sale in June. And Highland Mills Church offers food pantry each Friday for one hour for those in need.

The churches have emergency cards for women who need help in the event of a domestic violence incident. "If a person is missing one to two weeks in a row, I call to see if all is OK," Resling says. "We have a visitation team in place who will visit in case of particular needs." The congregations also collect toiletries and other supplies for the residents of Safe Homes, a women's emergency shelter in New York's Orange County.

*Kristin Knudson is a freelance writer living in Baltimore.

The Rev. Darlene Resling suggests ways to reach out to women and girls:

1. Learn about domestic abuse and help church understand that there are no limits on who might be affected.
2. Become acquainted with the Safe Homes group in your areas and invite a volunteer or staff as a speaker.
3. Be sure that NO abusive behavior is modeled by any adults in the church.
4. Be sure that the pastor is a listener who is open-minded and not caught up in the "Holy Hush" thinking mode.
5. Be clear and consistent in the church ethics policy...whom to contact with questions, issues, etc.
6. Be sure the Safe Sanctuaries is in place and that teachers and volunteers have background checks.
7. Publicize that your church is a safe and inviting place to worship.