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GCSRW Staff:

M. Garlinda Burton
LeeAnn Goldman
Elaine Moy
Darryl Stephens

FLYER editor:

Heather Peck Stahl

Web coordinator/editor:

Lindsey Graham

www.gcsr.org

www.umsexualethics.org

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GET ORGANIZED NOW!

Start COSROW ministries NOW in your congregation, district or conference

By M. Garlinda Burton

Congregations, districts and annual conferences all may have a Commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW) or equivalent structure to help assure that women and girls are included equally in leadership, representation and decision-making in the church.

The specific work of annual conference COSROWs is outlined in *The Book of Discipline*, Par. 644. What follows are some ideas for making your commission or committee more responsive, effective and inclusive in the coming year.

Members and leaders

Consider a shared-leadership model, with perhaps a clergy person and a layperson—or a young woman and an older woman, or a racial-ethnic woman and a white woman—as co-chairs. This can help keep focus on the full participation of all women.

If you are a district or annual conference COSROW, make sure your members include persons from different congregations and communities across the area, again to ensure that you are responding to diverse concerns. Don't forget to include men among your members. Addressing and overcoming sexism is not just women's work; men who love and support women can be powerful allies and role models for other men in your local churches or region.

As you are recruiting new commission members, orient them to the ministry to which we are called. *The Journey Is Our Home*, a history of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW), a **PowerPoint presentation on the work of the Commission**, and other information are available online.

Start by gathering data

COSROW's primary work is identifying areas for improvement in the full inclusion of women and helping the church move toward that goal. While all annual conferences, districts and congregations have room for growth and improvement in naming and surmounting institutional sexism, it is important to address the most critical areas in your contexts.

You need data to know where you are and what goals you're aiming for.

Start with a desk audit of your church, district or conference. Your church or conference office should have information on the total number of lay and clergy members and congregations in your context. You can also chart how many women and men are lay leaders, are in seminary, are on staff or are elected leaders of ministries in your area, or are on track for ordination/licensing as pastors.

GCSRW and the General Commission on Religion and Race (G CORR) conduct regular audits of annual

Check out the January-March 2009 issue of the FLYER (pages 4-5) for more detailed information and a suggested model of how to start an annual conference COSROW.

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conferences and churchwide agencies to determine such things as how women and people of color are represented among staff and voting members, and which entities have policies to address sexual and racial harassment. Some of the statistics from the last GCSRW-GCORR audit are available in the Women by the Numbers articles in the **September, October and November 2010** issues of the FLYER.

Once you have an accurate picture of your congregation or region, meet as a committee/commission with your pastoral leadership or the conference leadership (bishop and cabinet, board of ordained ministry, director of connectional ministry). Discuss how you can work with your leadership team to establish strategies that will:

- » Increase the number of women—including racial-ethnic and young women—nurtured into ordained ministry and lay leadership. Women should be in the “pipeline” for future leadership positions. If not, then it is important to find out how they can be.
- » Step up evangelism and discipleship ministries specifically among women and girls.
- » Have the bishop urge all local United Methodists to become involved in ministries with the poor or ministries to improve health-care, particularly among women and girls.
- » Engage women and girls in local-church leadership in areas of worship, education and mission/social action.
- » Make a public witness in the name of the church in ways that specifically address the concerns of women and girls (i.e., support for single-parent families, better funding for public education, speaking out against sexual/domestic violence and economic injustice, and immigration reform).
- » Mark Women’s History Month and other milestones by raising awareness.

Model cross-team advocacy and action

At our best, COSROW doesn’t do “programs,” but rather we encourage the entire conference, district or congregation to include gender equity and empowerment of women in everything the church does and says.

As you plan your work for the next year, plan to meet and collaborate with the following groups on such projects and emphases as:

- » Recruiting and training women as congregational, district or conference leaders (United Methodist Women, worship committee and your church/conference connectional ministries team).
- » Recruiting and engaging lay leadership (conference or church lay leader).
- » Orientation for first-time women members of annual conference (United Methodist Women and director of connectional ministry). Mission with women and girls (United Methodist Women and church and society).
- » Orienting first-time women members of annual conference and across your region (United Methodist Women, communications chairperson and pastoral leadership).
- » Monitoring your annual conference session for inclusiveness and diversity (local commission on religion and race and ministries with young people).

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- » Advocating for stronger conference policies to prevent and address gender discrimination, sexual harassment and sexual misconduct by clergy and other leaders.
- » Addressing social/moral issues that impact women, such as domestic violence, economic injustice, hospitality to immigrants, affordable healthcare and childcare (church and society and United Methodist Women).
- » Addressing institutional sexism and healing gender bias (United Methodist Men, United Methodist Women and board of ordained ministry)

More information, training materials and suggestions are available at www.gcsrw.org, or see this **past issue of the FLYER** for ideas. To get one-to-one support and coaching on launching or strengthening COSROW ministries, email gcsrw@gcsrw.org or call (312) 346-4900.

—*M. Garlinda Burton* is general secretary of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.



WOMEN BY THE NUMBERS

Church can learn from business study: Gender equity boosts performance

By Elaine Moy

Making your church or workplace more “women welcoming” may benefit all people, according to a recent article in *Crain’s Chicago Business*. The article recounted the results of a study of more than 100 successful teams in 21 major companies.

Try these and you may realize these advantages in morale and ministry.

Recounting a study of more than 100 teams at 21 companies, groups with EQUAL numbers of men and women were “more likely to experiment, be creative, share knowledge and fulfill tasks than teams with other compositions.” So, too, the church can increase membership, participation and vitality if we learn to:

1. **Balance the number of males and females.** The study found that agencies with equal numbers of women and men demonstrate a higher level of cooperation and performance.
2. **Ask women why they leave—and why they stay.** Women in the companies studied routinely leave mid-career to go into the government and non-profit sector. We know a higher percentage of clergywomen than clergymen leave local churches for other ministries, citing the “glass ceiling,” lack of flexibility and challenge. How do churches and church agencies pigeonhole or stifle women? How do we engage and challenge women?
3. **Adopt family-friendly policies and practices.** The work-family balance issue is almost as important for men now as it is for women, the study found. For the church to increase the number of young clergy and lay workers, we must consider their social and family needs in our programming, ministries and work expectations.
4. **Think and act beyond gender stereotypes.** David Van De Voort of Buck Consulting admits, “There is still an issue in this country with females being intentionally or unintentionally directed toward non-lines roles, as opposed to line management roles. Organizations that are truly enlightened are the ones who don’t have pink assignments and blue assignments.” Women can do more than staff the nursery and the flower/altar guild.
5. **Offer variety, flexibility, and learning opportunities.** Twenty years ago, only women were asking for things like flex time, mentoring, continuing education and multiple entry points. Today, men and women alike name these as important options in the workplace—and in their churches.

—Elaine Moy is assistant general secretary for finance and administration.



SEXUAL ETHICS

Everyone agrees that clergy sexual abuse is a bad thing, yet clergy are still abusing

By James Newton Poling

We have trained thousands of congregational leaders on clergy sexual abuse, yet many churches continue to deny and minimize when a beloved leader betrays their trust.

What is going on here? Why is this problem so stubborn?

- » Some people say it is just human sin. Individuals enjoy abusing their power to manipulate and control others.
- » Some say it is because of our confused ideas about sexuality. We can't talk about sex in church without creating a mess.
- » Some say it is theology. As long as we promote ideas like "sacrifice," "servanthood," obedience and forgiveness, we create clergy who put themselves in the place of God and expect others to serve their needs.

I say that it is all of the above, and the thing that links them together is abuse of power. The problem the church doesn't talk about is power and how God wants us to use power.

Human sin can be understood as the abuse of power. In our failure to find the nurturing relationships and prosperity we want, humans engage in manipulation and power plays to get what we think we need. In this sense, clergy sexual abuse is just one among many forms of abuse of power in the church, one of "the many temptations that inevitably accompanies power."

Sexuality can be understood in relation to power. Sexuality is a human drive that permeates all our relationships. Sexuality as a commodity drives advertising and U.S. values. Because we don't talk about sex in a sensible way, we push sexuality into the unconscious world where its power multiplies. The structure that creates this mess is male dominance or patriarchy.

Theological doctrines are forms of power. All the terms above – sacrifice, obedience and forgiveness – depend on power. Who is sacrificing for whom; who is obedient to whom; and who is asked to forgive whom? Who decides these questions is a matter of power.

So what do we mean by power and the abuse of power? What is power for, and how can we recognize the abuse of power? How can we use power to prevent clergy from abusing their power? Through our public debates, our policies on sexual misconduct, our training programs, and our response teams, we are challenging the usual power arrangements to provide healing for the victims of clergy sexual abuse and accountability for everyone.

Every reform movement is a claim on power, and the movement to prevent clergy sexual abuse is no exception. We need to change the way the church mistreats victims – by silence, by shunning, and sometimes by forcing them to leave the church. We need to change the ethics of church leadership so that vulnerable people will no longer become victims of sexual exploitation in the church family. We need true repentance and rehabilitation for offenders as they are restored to membership in the community. We need to restore the faith and trust of the congregation so it is empowered to fulfill God's mission of love in the community.

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I believe that all power is from God. Abuse of power is the abuse of a gift that God gives to us.

If we want power, we need to understand what it is and what God intended when God gave human beings power. We live in the power of the Holy Spirit that calls us every day to “do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God” (Micah 6:8). We believe that we have power to change all of these things “through Christ who strengthens us” (Philippians 4:13). We have received power from God to live fully in the excitement and challenge of this world until God’s kingdom comes.

Read the full article, “Clergy Sexual Abuse as Abuse of Power,” under Articles and Lectures at <http://jamesnewtonpoling.com>.

—James Newton Poling is a retired minister with the Presbyterian Church (USA) and member of the Presbytery of Western North Carolina. He taught pastoral theology, care and counseling for 15 years at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Ill.

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Celebrate Women-Empowering Worship in Your Congregation!

The Rev. Cynthia Wilson has created several worship resources for use in your congregation: an entire worship service bulletin, planning resource and theological narrative. Additionally, GCSRW offers inclusive language guidelines, 40th anniversary bulletin inserts and a skit recalling the 1972 creation of GCSRW. Visit www.gcsr.org for these suggested worship resources.

Remember, GCSRW also has buttons, stickers, copies of our 40th-anniversary video and African-style altar fabric for use in local church, district, seminary, school and conference celebrations. Contact LeeAnn Goldman (lgoldman@gcsr.org), 312.346.4900.





GCSRW AT 40

Commission's 1982 investigations led to transformation of Boston University

By Heather Peck Stahl

In 1982, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) was invited to investigate the firing of a popular female faculty member at United Methodist-related Boston University School of Theology.

A four-member team found that the seminary was not only guilty of sexual discrimination in the firing, but that female students were being harassed and female faculty members were being denied tenure.

After then-dean Richard Nesmith fired Nancy Richardson, associate dean of student and community life at Boston University's School of Theology, students, staff and women's advocates across the church cried foul. News of the dismissal spread quickly.

Students were more than a little upset at the firing of one of the most popular faculty members at the United Methodist-related seminary.

The Commission was invited to investigate what many described as an epidemic of gender discrimination and harassment against students and faculty, including the popular Richardson, by male administrators at the prestigious school.

A four-member team from GCSRW interviewed members of the administration, faculty, staff, alumnae and student body. Former women faculty members were interviewed prior to the visit.

Some students and faculty wore green armbands to support the investigating team during their three-day visit.

Carolyn Oehler, president of the Commission at that time, was a member of the team and she says the visit revealed more than the dismissal of a female faculty member.

Female students told her about a high-profile professor "who used grades to pressure women to have sexual relationships with him."

Oehler asked why the students didn't report him. "No one would believe a student over a well-known and high-status professor," they responded.

"In addition, several women talked about the harassment they experienced by senior pastors when they were in a field placement," says Oehler. "This included pushing them up against a wall and rubbing against them and propositioning them. The women felt powerless and fearful that they would not get a passing grade in field education if they reported this behavior.

"My general memory is how powerless the women—from student to faculty—felt," she concludes.

After their visit, the team asked the school to follow its own affirmative action goal of adding women and racial/ethnic persons to the faculty and staff. They also asked the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM) to investigate the situation.

When asked in 1982 why the agency undertook the unprecedented investigation, Trudie Kibbe Preciphs (now Reed), a member of the GCSRW general secretariat, said the Commission "accepts individual advocacy cases primarily as a means of bringing about systemic changes."

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In a more recent interview, as she reflected on the significance of the Boston investigation, Oehler says, “It showed we were serious about investigating charges of sexism. We were willing to spend time and money supporting women who were being discriminated against.”

Oehler also says that the case revealed sexual discriminatory practices and led to change in attitudes and practices in all seminaries. Today there are far more women serving on the faculties of United Methodist seminaries, she adds.

“I think [the investigation] raised our profile and showed we were serious and competent in this area,” says Oehler. “I think it also helped us realize that we could not change the church one case at a time. We moved to auditing seminaries and agencies for gender inclusiveness and making more general recommendations.”

In 2005, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women held its first annual meeting at Boston University School of Theology and met with women students and staff. While the women admitted there are still challenges to be overcome, they celebrated the increased number of tenured faculty at the school and praised GCSRW for helping open doors for women in theological education.

—*Heather Peck Stahl* is editor of the *FLYER*.

IN MEMORIAM:



Bishop Leontine T.C. Kelly

The Bishop Leontine Turpeau Current Kelly died at age 92 on June 28. The first African-American woman bishop, Kelly was known as a trailblazer, a spiritual mother, a bearer for women of color in leadership and a gift to The United Methodist Church.

GCSRW General Secretary M. Garlinda Burton, remembers Kelly as “the first African-American woman bishop in mainline Christendom who modeled grace, strength, faith and compassion for me and countless others. She opened doors for women of all likes in The United Methodist Church and beyond. I thank God for her world-rocking ministry! Every time I hear the hymn, ‘How Firm a Foundation,’ I will celebrate her legacy!”

Visit [UMNS](#) to read more about Kelly’s legacy.