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The General
Commission on
the Status and
Role of Women



BUDGET CUTS, 'RIGHT SIZING' AND GENERAL AGENCY EMPLOYMENT SHIFTS: ARE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH-WIDE AGENCIES BECOMING MORE OR LESS DIVERSE?

WASHINGTON, D.C., APRIL 9, 2010 -- A new [position paper](#) analyzing diversity in the workplace of United Methodist agencies raises questions and concerns about the true costs of conducting mission and ministry in financially strapped times. It also reveals a disturbing trend in diversity loss.

Agencies across the denomination struggled mightily with decreased giving by church members and lower payment of church-wide apportionments in recent years, resulting in work force reductions and organizational realignments. According to the latest research by the General Commission on Religion and Race (GCORR) and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) the accompanying employment shifts exposed a flaw in the 'right-sizing' process that impacts the denomination's future in ministry. "Over the long term, we've become less diverse," said GCORR general secretary Erin Hawkins. "According to the data, we've eroded in 9 years the diversity within the denomination's agencies that has taken 30 years to build."

The GCORR/GCSRW report on employment trends was published April 9, 2010 and is available on the websites of both GCORR and GCSRW. It is designed to help the United Methodist Church look critically at how the church envisions its future in ministry, as it seeks to be relevant in an increasingly multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual world.

Initially, research focused on employment statistics gathered from 2008 and 2009, a time when a number of agencies saw reductions in staffs due to retirement, resignations, downsizing and restructuring. GCORR says it was approached by caucuses and leaders around the church who were concerned that the number of racial ethnics and women who were part of the staff reductions was disproportionately high. The employment review, with statistics provided by the agencies themselves, sheds light on the concern but analyzing further, researchers found the real story was in trends that started 30 years ago.

Researchers were able to compare employment statistics going back to 1971. They could see that between the 70's and 90's as the country's economy grew, so did the number of persons of color, and women within the ranks of our agencies. At its peak, the ratio of racial ethnic to white staff was almost 50/50. But the country's financial downturn also signaled a downturn for women and racial ethnic staff in United Methodist agencies. "Crises will come, this is certain, but our denomination has to find a way to maintain its commitment to diversity, even as challenges arise," said Hawkins. "The 2008 and 2009 prompted us to do some further investigating. What this data proves is the systemic causes at work that create barriers to diversity."

The agencies' research suggests that within all levels of employment – from executive management to service and maintenance levels, there was a disproportionate number of job losses for racial ethnic groups and racial ethnic women, compared to their white counterparts. The research also showed that if the decline in diversity continues at the current rate, by 2019 the employment diversity profiles of general agencies for most racial ethnics will diminish to the levels of 1971. According to Hawkins the paper provided the canary in the coal mine. "It gives us time to start working on solutions."

"The dilemma cannot be fixed solely by employing greater numbers of racial ethnic persons and women," said GCSRW general secretary Garlinda Burton. "The church needs to be willing and ready to value and demonstrate its commitment to inclusion by fostering a positive work environment and move beyond "photo diversity." We need to ask the hard questions, 'What is the church missing that allows these types of low numbers to exist? What does it say about systemic sexism and racism, and what needs to change systemically to allow for more inclusion in the ministry of the church?"

(more)

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GCORR's strategies for helping the church turn the tide will be returning to the research, and providing follow up reports on employment figures and rolling out resources that aid agencies in cultivating communities where diversity can thrive. GCORR will also present and publish a state of the church document at the end of 2010 to show the progress made in reversing the trend.

What arises from viewing the statistics in the position paper is an opportunity to connect the church's mission priorities with its vision for inclusion. The report states, "Meaningful inclusion requires a critical and holistic assessment of the structures...and an intentional equipping of those administering those processes." As United Methodist agencies seek to engage the priorities outlined in the Four Areas of Focus, including creating new places for new people and stamping out killer diseases and improving health globally, the report concludes that the church will need the involvement of diverse communities to ensure successful implementation of ministry in these areas that reflects the Wesleyan commitment to follow the example of Jesus and to embrace all humanity.

The position paper was produced as part of the Disciplinary mandates of both the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, and the General Commission on Religion and Race, to monitor and advocate for racial inclusiveness and equal participation of women and racial ethnics in the total life of the Church, (*par. 2008.2, 2102, The Book of Discipline, The United Methodist Church.*) The data collected will be shared with boards and agencies and leaders throughout the denomination.

The General Commission on Religion and Race is charged with "reviewing, evaluating, and assisting agencies and institutions of the church as they seek to develop programs and policies to implement the mandate for racial inclusiveness, including equality of compensation for racial and ethnic lay staff at all levels of the Church." (Par. 2008.2, *The Book of Discipline, 2008*)

Similarly, the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women is authorized to serve as advocate, monitor, and catalyst among church agencies "to eradicate discriminatory policies and practices in any form" in order to insure "full and equal participation of women in the total life and mission of the Church." (Par. 2102, *Discipline*)

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