

REPORT FROM GENERAL SYNOD

Dear Friends,

I attended General Synod in Baltimore as a delegate and participated with the committee that had responsibility for the resolution titled: **Affirming and Supporting the Authorized Ministries of Under-represented Clergy in Local Congregations: A Call for Greater Representation and Economic Justice**. I anticipated there would be concerns about how local congregations would respond to the mandates included in it. But as I learned more about why this resolution was important and heard stories of those impacted by it, I know that this is an important justice issue for the UCC.

The UCC is intentional about diversity, including among authorized ministers called to serve local churches. On the surface, it may look like we are doing a good job. Statistically, there are equal numbers of men and women who are active, authorized ministers. But a closer look reveals that a significant majority of those in full-time pastorates are men, while women fill the majority of part-time or associate positions. When you factor in the effects of race / ethnicity, gender variance (LGBTQ), and physical abilities, the differences become much more pronounced. Persons of color are under-represented in solo and interim pastor positions, and over-represented in associate and part-time positions, and many are serving in other capacities (diaconal ministries, missionaries, institutional chaplains) because they are unable to find a church who will consider them. And persons of color serving in comparable church settings are statistically paid on average \$10,000 less per year than their white counterparts. When you factor in reduced retirement contributions (based on those salaries) over a lifetime, this represents significant financial discrimination.

It was heartbreaking to hear stories of fellow clergy who have tried to answer God's call to serve as a local church pastor, but have not been able to. They have gone through the process to be ordained and been affirmed every step of the way, but in many cases, local congregations have refused to consider them because of their skin color, gender identity, or physical presence. Imagine going through years of study and preparation, only to be told "We need someone who matches our culture." Imagine constantly sending out your profile (sometimes for years) and never even being called for an interview. Imagine trying to hide who you are (by not including a photo in your profile snapshot, or omitting other personal information) just to try to get a search committee to talk to you. How can we say we love our neighbors when we reject out of hand those whom God has called? How can we be more welcoming of people with gifts for ministry so they can actually use those gifts?

This resolution calls us to rethink how we go about choosing candidates to fill our church pulpits. It calls for the national and conference settings to provide guidance and training to local church search committees so they will seriously interview and call candidates they would not otherwise consider. This is important, but I sense the bulk of the work and responsibility will need to come from local congregations.

Local congregations are now being called to be serious about nondiscrimination in their personnel and hiring policies so that qualified candidates will not be excluded on the basis of race, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression.

Local congregations are now being called to participate in open dialogue, education, and discussion to identify and eliminate barriers based on institutional bias that prevent qualified

candidates in these under-represented groups from being seriously considered in the search and call process.

Local congregations are also being called to commit to providing comparable financial compensation to their ministers (regardless of identity) and to adhere, as best they can, to Conference Compensation Guidelines to ensure all of our denominations ministers are treated fairly financially.

I know this won't be easy, but I believe it is necessary. One of the things I appreciate about General Synod is the way it articulates and expands the vision of what it means to be the Church and followers of Christ, especially when it challenges us to continue to listen and learn and grow.

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