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Lead Women Pastors Project Survey Summary

The United Methodist Church celebrated the 50th anniversary of clergy rights for women in the Methodist tradition in 2006 sponsored by the Office of Continuing Formation for Ministry of The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM). As The United Methodist Church is greeting a new era of women's leadership in the Church, the question is, "How can the church equip younger generations of clergywomen to fulfill their calling to serve the needs of the present age that demands gender inclusivity in its theology and practice?" The Lead Women Pastors Project (LWPP) was initiated in response to this question sparked by the 2006 International Clergywomen's Consultation. The purpose of the LWPP is to affirm, empower, research, and nurture leadership of clergywomen who are serving churches with a membership of 1,000 or more.¹ Lead women pastors have been "cracking a glass ceiling" within the Church in spite of an apparent lack of support, affirmation, and recognition of their unique contributions. As of December 31, 2004 there were 34,659 United Methodist churches in the United States. 1,154 churches had a membership of 1,000 or greater and sixty-four of those have a woman as lead pastor.²

The LWPP was a comprehensive twelve weeks of continuing education that consisted of online learning, retreats, and the creation of a support network. One of the components of the LWPP is to research lead women pastors' leadership styles.³ The Lead Pastors research has been conducted by GBHEM to describe unique ways of how women leading in large church ministry settings compare to men. In the past most understandings of leadership styles have been defined from male perspectives.

The surveys were sent to ninety-four lead women pastors and a randomly selected sample of three hundreds male lead pastors.⁴ The response rate was 50.8%.⁵

Age, Race and Marriage Status of Lead Women Pastors

The average age of lead women pastors (LWP) was fifty-three years old which is three years younger than lead male pastors (LMP). Although LWP are younger, they are more likely to have served more appointments prior to a large church (see career trajectory below). Of those who

¹ The term "lead pastor" was defined by the General Board of Council on Finances as clergy who are serving churches with 1,000 or more members within The United Methodist Church.

² This figure was reported in the 2005 General Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the UMC. Compiled by the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA).

³ Leadership style was defined as "relatively consistent patterns of interaction that typify leaders as individuals. Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli, *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders* (Center for Public Leadership) (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 2007), 133.

⁴ Note the increase in lead women pastors since 2004. The Office of Continuing Formation for Ministry identified 94 lead women pastors as of October of 2008.

⁵ 30 % (61) of LWP and 70% (139) of LMP responded to the survey.

completed the survey, 99% of them were Caucasians.⁶ 69% of LWP were married compared to 99% of LMP are married.

Career Trajectory

According to the survey, LWP are within an average of four appointments and men an average of 3.75 appointments before becoming a lead pastor.⁷ 70% of LWP and 68% of LMP have been ordained between 29-39 years of age. One out of five of both LWP and LMP have served as a district superintendent. However, more women have served as a district superintendent prior to their current appointment.⁸ More LWP have served appointments beyond the local church prior to their current appointment.⁹ More LWP have been associate pastors prior to becoming a LWP.¹⁰ Less than 10% of LWP have served as chairs of the Board of Ordained Ministry or have been an Episcopal candidate. More LWP have been candidates for episcopacy in the past than LMP.¹¹

It appears that a common career trajectory within The United Methodist Church for women is through the denominationally controlled leadership structure of the church. The most frequent experiences of women pastors prior to serving as a lead pastor of a large church have been as associate pastors, district superintendents and candidates for Episcopacy.

It was interesting to learn that there were seven males and one female who became a lead pastor in their first appointment. Does this mean that these pastors already had leadership qualities that large churches demand when first entering into ministry? Or does this mean that more Cabinets perceive that males have a higher capability of leading a large church than women? This correlates with the most challenging issues for women in ministry today. In a later part of this report both LWP and LMP agree that the “appointment process” is one of the most challenging issues within the UMC structure.

It was also interesting to find out that one-fourth of LWP and one-third of LMP are second career clergy who had been teachers, in business or had military careers. This means that clergy who bring different skills into their ministry may do well in a large church ministry context where previous leadership and teaching skills that deal with diverse opinions and deeper understandings of finances are expected in the large church setting. The Church needs to recognize and utilize skills that second career clergy bring into ordained ministry, especially in the leadership of large churches.

From interview data the perception of clergywomen is that male clergy are more likely to ask for an appointment to a large church. There is reluctance for women to self-identify as a lead pastor. There is a need to challenge clergywomen to recognize and affirm their gifts for serving the large church.

⁶ There was one Asian and one African American LMP and one African American lead woman pastor.

⁷ Actually, 49% of LWP took five appointments compared to 31% for LMP.

⁸ 20% of LWP were district superintendents compare to 16% of LMP.

⁹ 22% of LWP served appointment beyond local church compared to 7% of LMP.

¹⁰ 16% of LWP were associate pastors compared to only 8% of LMP.

¹¹ 11% of LWP have been candidates for Episcopacy compared to only 6% of LMP.

Education

Lead pastors are highly educated. 70% of LWP and 64% of LMP are educated in The United Methodist seminaries. 88% of LWP and 84% of LMP hold a Doctor of Ministry degree. 10-15% of all lead pastors have academic doctorates or Ph.D.

Lead pastors are high achievers academically. The fact that The United Methodist Seminaries have produced the majority of LWP is significant in terms of openness to women in our seminaries and thus valuing and nurturing their gifts in ministry in theological education.

Salaries

Among the respondents, 31% of LWP earned \$100,000 or more including housing allowances compared to 18% of LMP. According to The Lewis Center for Church Leadership this finding does not match with other reports about clergy salary. For example, the largest of the top 100 United Methodist Churches are served by males as lead pastors and the majority of the male respondents for this survey are serving the middle and bottom third of the large churches. A very few LWP are serving the top third of the largest churches and their average salaries are about 27% lower than LMP which is a significant finding.¹²

This means that there is still a ‘glass-ceiling’ for salaries, the church needs to pay attention to this reality in order for women to break even among lead pastors.

Congregational Context

More LWP are serving in the suburbs of large cities compared to LMP serving in mid-size cities and small towns.¹³ This has a cultural implication that the suburbs of large cities are more open to women in ministry.

A significant finding in this study is that the average membership and worship attendance of churches served by LWP are higher than the churches served by male respondents. All lead pastors have multiple weekly services but LWP were more likely to have more than three services.¹⁴

LWP also had more full-time staff (ten or more) and some lead pastors reported that they have to supervise over twenty different staff positions. LWP supervise an average of additional two more staff than LMP.

The data shows that LWP have more responsibilities than LMP in a similar context.

Unique Leadership Style

¹² Based on 2007 report larges churches have three levels in The UMC: the small size (1,000-1,272 members), the medium size (1,272-1,809 members), and the large size (1,810 or more members). Among the small size churches women and men serve make comparable salary, women are paid about two percent more. Among the medium size large churches men are paid about four percent more. Among the large size large churches men receive twenty-seven percent more than women. Lovett H. Weems, Jr., Ann A. Michel, Joseph E. Arnold, and Tana Brown, *“Report on Lead Pastor Survey Conducted by The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Fall 2008.”* 2.

¹³ 51% of LWP are serving in a suburb of large city compared to 33% of LMP. 27% of LWP are serving in a mid-size city compared to 35% of LMP.

¹⁴ 32% of LWP have four weekly services compared to 16% of LMP.

Working with a large staff, having great administrative skills, ability to plan in detail, being a visionary leader, and delegation of ministry are unique leadership styles that lead pastors identified. LWP also noted that they have become more directive, confident, and decisive in their leadership styles. It is interesting to know that more LWP had military experience where assertiveness is learned and valued. However, lead pastors reported that a decrease in pastoral focus was evident in their context overall.

- **Strong Spirituality**

The most important aspect of leadership for both LWP and LMP was “to be personally well grounded spirituality.”¹⁵ Another was “to shepherd the mission and ministry of the congregation” for LWP and “to equip and empower others for leadership” for LMP. It may be significant or surprising that more LMP reported that they were able to “help lay people discern.”

- **Excellent Preacher**

The three greatest gifts for ministry among LWP are preaching, leadership, and administration. Preaching, teaching, and administration are for LMP.

About half of the lead pastors are spending ten or more hours for sermon preparation each week. The fact that a lead pastors’ greatest gift is preaching and how many hours they are spending for sermon preparation mean that being a good preacher is one of the most important qualities of leadership for a lead pastor. Lead pastors spend the majority of their time (more than 70 percent) in worship planning, administration, pastoral care and meetings.

- **Strong Financial Management**

More than 60% of LWP reported that their confidence level with financial management has improved and their skills of managing finance have changed since becoming a LWP. More LWP use indirect communication, through other leaders in the congregation, about stewardship. More LMP feel more comfortable talking about money directly. More LWP (49%) reported that they feel confident in fundraising then LMP (34%). However, only 33% of LWP reported that they feel confident in church finances compared to 58% of LMP.

Conflict Management

LWP reported less major conflicts for the last two years than LMP¹⁶ and more LWP considered conflict something to be avoided according to the survey. For example, more LWP would rather ignore the situation if they are verbally attacked by a parishioner in a meeting.

Staff and clergy, changes in worship style and finances are top conflict sources among lead pastors. More LWP reported conflict with local outreach groups.¹⁷ This may indicate that The United Methodist congregations have a better understanding of gender inclusiveness because of

¹⁵ 44% of LWP and 54% of LMP said that “to be personally well grounded spiritually” is the most important in their leadership. 43% of LWP said that “to shepherd the mission and ministry of the congregation” as the second most important for their leadership. 44% of LMP said that “to equip and empower others for leadership” as the second most important for their leadership.

¹⁶ 23% of LWP reported that there have been major conflicts over the past two years compared to 37% of LMP.

¹⁷ 15% of LWP had conflicts with local outreach groups over the past two years compared to 3% of LMP. 2% of LWP experienced conflicts related to sexual misconduct over the past two years compared to 8% of LMP.

denominational commitments than the surrounding community that have different values and theological understandings about women.

More LWP lead change by “informally planting seeds and hope they take root” and LMP more likely to lead change by “intentionally recruiting support from individuals and groups.”¹⁸ More LMP are seeking feed back from the congregation and more of them perceive that their congregations value a “nurturing” leadership style. They also tend to make decisions by “analyzing the issues involved” than LWP.

This shows that LWP have a less head on confronting leadership style in terms of conflict management. LWP also appear more discrete in terms of leading changes. They seek others’ assistance more than males in terms of dealing with sensitive issues, such as financial appeal.

The Most Challenging Issues

The two top challenging issues for lead pastors are church finances and staffing.¹⁹ The next two issues are work load and time management.

- **The Most Challenging Issues for Women Clergy Today**

When this question was asked the majority of LWP identified that “more clergywomen serve large churches” and “balancing ministry and family responsibilities” as two most challenging issues for women clergy today. The next was “acceptance of leadership styles” and “appointment process.” However, for LMP the “acceptance of leadership styles” and “balancing ministry and family responsibilities” were the top two. The next was “more clergywomen serving large churches” and “appointment process.” In terms of self-care, 34% of LMP take all of their vacation compared to 29% of LWP.

This data indicates that clergywomen are more concerned about advancement of women’s leadership in the Church than clergymen. This may reveal male clergy’s investment in male models of leadership for the large church and fear of or reluctance of women’s leadership. Interestingly both groups did not see salary equity or retention issues as significant issues for women.

Perceived Gender Differences in Leadership

According to the data both LWP and LMP overwhelmingly noted gender difference with leadership styles with noted exceptions. The majority noted that many women have to work harder for acceptance and leadership. They also agree that more often, standing authority is given to men. More men did not see leadership differences as significant and more LMP agree that women are more relational and nurturing. This correlates with women being less confrontational and seeking more collegial efforts in terms of dealing with conflicts and financial issues. For example, 10% of LMP openly display emotion often compared to 7% of LWP. 54% of LWP rarely display emotion openly compared to 46% of LMP.

¹⁸ 57% of LWP often and always informally plant seeds compared to 46% of LMP. 78% of LWP often and always intentionally recruit support compared to 91% of LMP.

¹⁹ 43% of LWP and 40% of LMP agreed that issues related to church finances are the most challenging issues. 49% of LWP and 42% of LMP agreed that staffing issue is the second most challenging issue.

It is also interesting that more LMP perceive their congregations value “nurturing leadership.” LMP also think LWP are more relational and nurturing. Does this mean that LMP feel inadequate in certain areas of leadership aspects as lead pastors?

94% of LWP and 85% of LMP developed their leadership style from their mistakes, learning, and experience. 77% of LWP developed their leadership style by having role models. 61% of LWP and 46% of LMP reported that they developed their leadership style by formal leadership training. About 2/3 of lead pastors have taken leadership development continuing education courses.

This data shows that lead pastors do not have a support system that they can turn to within the Church. However, it is encouraging to know that 77% of LWP had role models for their leadership development. 51% of LWP took personal mentoring and coaching courses. This provides validity for developing a coaching program for LWP.

In terms of making decisions, LWP are more sensitive to political ramifications of their decisions.²⁰ Both LWP and LMP make decisions by consensus rather than taking votes. 61% of LMP see themselves more decisive compared to 56% of LWP. 74% of LMP see themselves as servant leader compared to 62% of LWP.

Conclusion

Through research, we learned that lead women pastors still serve large churches as pioneers. 90% of women said that they were the first women pastor serving as a lead pastor in their current appointment. 75% of lead women pastors believe that serving a large church is a special call. Their understanding that they’ve been called by God to serve this particular setting sustains their strength and integrity in the midst of maneuvering their leadership style as women. Solid spirituality, excellent preaching, and strong financial management skills are trade marks of being an effective lead woman pastor. Their leadership styles appear more collaborative, relational, equipping, diplomatic, discrete, equipping, directive, prophetic, delegatory, confident, decisive, creative, adaptive, compassionate and less confrontational in conflict than lead men pastors in this study. Even though there is still a glass ceiling that women need to break, knowing that there is possibly only one woman serving the top 100 of the largest United Methodist Churches, the experiences of these lead women pastors will serve as a resource for the formation of younger generations of women leadership for not only the UMC but also in our society.

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²⁰ 32% of LWP consider often and always the political ramifications of every decision compared to 29% of LMP.