

Active Clergywomen in Local Church: 2006

Michelle Fugate, Ph.D., Director of Research and Data Management
General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church

The number of female clergy in The United Methodist Church has increased significantly in recent years. In his analysis of clergy membership, Craig This found that while more than half of annual conferences had 19 percent or more clergywomen there was a lack of uniformity across conferencesⁱ. As the number of clergywomen increases, questions emerge: Where are clergywomen appointed? Are they appointed as the senior pastor as frequently as their male counterparts? Are they appointed to the largest membership churches?

Using data provided by the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) of The United Methodist Church, this report addresses those questions. Data include all active clergy appointed to local churches, to settings beyond the local church, and to extension ministries as of December 2006 and church membership data for 2004.

All Active Clergy

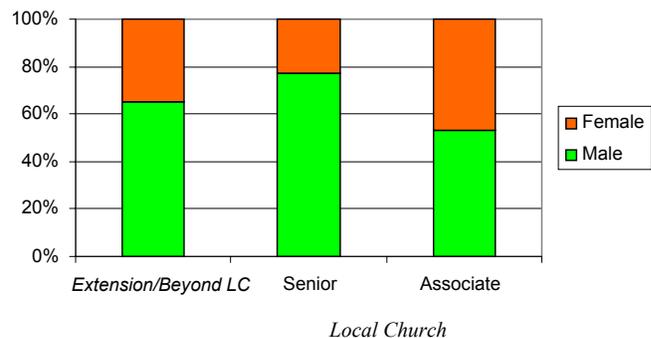
As of December 2006, there were 32,742 active clergy appointed to local churches, to settings beyond the local church, and to extension ministries. The majority are male (73 percent 23,848, and 27 percent (8,892) are femaleⁱⁱ. A small percentage of the clergy are Black/African American (7 percent 2,184), almost 3 percent (895) are Asian, and 2 percent (559) are Hispanic. The majority are White/Caucasian (88 percent, 28,837), and 1 percent (267) are Native American, Pacific Islander, or multiracial.

Local Church/ Beyond the Local Church, and Extension Ministries

Eleven percent (3,704) of the active clergy is appointed to extension ministries or to settings beyond the local church and 89 percent to a local church. Those in the local church are categorizedⁱⁱⁱ as either senior (76 percent) or associate (13%) clergy.

Shown in figure 1, a greater percentage of clergy in extension ministry or beyond the local church are male (65 percent) than are female (35 percent). Similarly, in the local church, senior clergy are more often male (74 percent) than are female (23 percent). At the associate level, however, just over half are male (53 percent) compared to just under half female (47 percent).

Figure 1. Clergy Appointment by Sex



Solo Clergy

There are 25,037 churches where clergy are located. Most (89 percent) of those churches are served by one clergy person, however, some are served by multiple clergy; 8 percent are served by two clergy persons and 3 percent of the churches by more than two and up to thirteen clergy.

Most often where the clergy is the only clergy serving the church (solo) that clergy person is a senior clergy person. In fact, less than one percent of the churches with a solo clergy person is served by an associate clergy person only.

Seventy six percent of the solo senior clergy are male and 24 percent are female. Where the associate pastor is solo, 55 percent are male and 45 percent female.

Membership

For the 24,791 churches with membership data^{iv} membership ranges up to 16,488 members. The average membership is 298 (Std. 489.79). Three-fourths of the churches have fewer than 335 members. In other words, few churches have membership exceeding 335 members. Less than 5 percent (1,154) of the total number of churches in the denomination have more than 1,000 members.

Shown in table 1, senior male clergy are slightly more often located in the large membership churches (28 percent) than they are in the smaller membership churches (24 percent each). Senior female clergy, however, are more often located in the smaller membership churches (27 to 30 percent) than in the large membership churches (15 percent).

Only 1 percent (64) of all senior female clergy are located in churches with over 1,000 members, while almost 6 percent of all senior male clergy are appointed to these large churches.

Table 1. Senior Pastor by Church Membership

| | All Male Clergy | All Female Clergy | Both Male & Female Clergy | TOTAL |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Fewer than 82 members | 24% (4,654) | 28% (1,532) | 18% (7) | 25% (6,193) |
| 82 thru 164 members | 24% (4,524) | 30% (1,668) | 13% (5) | 25% (6,197) |
| 165 thru 334 members | 24% (4,585) | 27% (1,519) | 32% (12) | 25% (6,116) |
| 335 and up | 28% (5,272) | 15% (844) | 37% (14) | 25% (6,130) |
| TOTAL churches | 100% (19,035) | 100% (5,563) | 100% (38) | 100% (24,636) |

Summary

In 2006, female clergy represented more than one-fourth of the active clergy in the local church, in settings beyond the local church, and in extension ministries. Female clergy are not as often senior clergy in the local church or in extension ministries. Female clergy as less often senior clergy at large membership churches as are senior male clergy.

ⁱ General Commission on the Status and Role of Women in The United Methodist Church. (2005).

ⁱⁱ Missing information about two clergy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Clergy at local churches are categorized as either a senior² level clergy or associate level clergy this categorization is separate from the number of clergy appointed to the local church. Clergy in extension ministries or settings beyond the local church are not in senior or associate positions. GCFA groups clergy into the categories of “prime pastor” and “associate pastor.” The grouping is based on the clergy position code. For clarity, this report uses the more familiar term “senior pastor” in place of “prime pastor.”

^{iv} No data are available for 246 churches.