

To: Ohio Conference Leadership Team
From: Ohio Conference Leadership Development Resource Team
Subject: Summary of Women in Ministry Survey
Date: Feb. 20, 2021

One of the main goals of the Leadership Development Resource Team has been to identify barriers to people exploring and pursuing pastoral ministry. One of the areas where we have focused our recent attention is in the area of women in ministry. We wondered if, and to what extent, the perceptions, beliefs and actions of people throughout Conference might still be a barrier, both for women to feel called or enabled to pursue ministry and for congregations who are looking for a pastor. This past fall we sent a survey to all our congregational pastors and church leaders.

We received responses from 85 pastors and leaders representing 27 of our more active congregations. Several congregations had multiple responders. We are very grateful for the honest and candid responses. Below are some of the Leadership Resource Development Team's general observations and comments based on the responses we received, as well as some suggestions for moving forward:

General Observations

- Many respondents expressed strong support for women to serve in leadership, both in general and specifically as pastors.
- To the best of the respondents' memory and experience, formal discussion and discernment regarding women in leadership has taken place in only about half of our congregations. Those formal discussions took place anywhere from two years ago to 50 years ago. Some questioned, "why are we still having this discussion," while others have not processed it until recently, and some not at all.
- Of the congregations that responded, almost all stated that they actively invite women to serve as elders or other top leadership roles.
- The responses seemed to indicate that people and congregations in the Ohio Conference are generally open to women serving in pastoral ministry positions. However, many people made a distinction between "lead" pastor vs. other roles. There is far less support for women to act in a lead/solo pastor role than in other leadership positions.
- Based on comments in the survey, the strongest resistance to women being considered or called as a pastor was expressed by men.
- Thirty-three responders indicated that there is not resistance in their congregation to a woman serving as a pastor. Among those who felt there is some resistance to female pastors in their congregation, the most common reasons for resistance were "holding a traditional view of gender roles" and "interpretation of biblical passages."
- Comments reflected that people tend to scrutinize women leaders more than they do men. For example, one or more negative experiences with a female in leadership caused a couple of responders to say they would not call, or would be hesitant to call a female pastor.

Conclusions drawn from our observations:

- It is important to acknowledge the struggle that women in ministry continue to face and realize that creates a barrier to women wanting to pursue ministry or to serve in Ohio Conference congregations.
- As a conference, we need to acknowledge that our congregations hold varying positions with regards to women serving as pastors. While a majority of congregations accept and affirm women's leadership in the positions of elder and associate or co-pastor roles, there is still room for growth, especially in the full acceptance of women in lead and/or solo pastor positions in some of our congregations.
- The desire of the Leadership Development Resource Team is that our beliefs and practices would consistently support and encourage women with gifts for ministry to pursue developing and using them within our conference and the wider Church.

Suggestions for moving forward

We suggest that:

- Conference Leadership issue a statement regarding this report.
- Conference equips regional pastors to encourage pastoral search committees and their congregations to consider both male and female candidates.
- The Credentialing Ministry Team include in their conversation with candidates a question about their belief regarding women in leadership.
- Provide a list of study resources for congregations or individuals on women in leadership.
- Consider hosting a workshop at Annual Conference Assembly on the theme of women in pastoral ministry.
- Conference continues to be mindful of the importance of providing opportunities for women to serve in Conference leadership roles.

Respectfully submitted,

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