



Research Summary:

Unequal Careers of Black and White Pastors in the
United Methodist Church in North and South Carolina

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About this Report

The Duke Clergy Health Initiative (CHI) is a team of social scientists, clergy, and others who identify and promote practices that help pastoral ministry thrive. Our primary focus is on the health of clergy in the North Carolina and Western North Carolina Annual Conferences of the United Methodist Church (UMC). We also work collaboratively with other groups to promote clergy well-being. CHI is funded through the generous support of the Rural Church Area of The Duke Endowment.

One important part of our work seeks to understand how race systematically alters the quality and conditions of pastors who are members of communities racialized by the broader society and recommend ways to improve equity in the denomination. While this work is ongoing, CHI reached a major milestone with the soon-to-be published article, "Reproducing Inequality in a Formally Anti-Racist Organization: The Case of Racialized Career Pathways in the United Methodist Church," which will be published in the March 2022 issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*. This article was written by Duke faculty member and CHI senior researcher, David Eagle, and his collaborator from the University of Maryland, Collin Mueller.

Once published, the original article upon which this report is based can be accessed through the following link: <https://doi.org/10.1086/719391>.

Research Focus

The research for this paper began 10 years ago when we held our first focus groups with Black clergy to understand the unique health challenges they faced in the UMC. During those conversations, pastors pushed the conversation beyond health and spoke of the myriad of struggles they face serving in a majority White organization. These conversations set us on a journey to understand how and why racial disparities are manifest among UMC clergy in the Carolinas and to outline possible interventions to improve the situation. In this report, we focus on racial disparities in salary and in the experience of their work environments. We ask whether the official policies of the denomination, including the appointment process, effectively build equity between Black and White clergy. Our hope is that in studying the mechanisms that produce racial inequalities in the United Methodist Church, we might be able to advance conversations about promising solutions.

Sources of Data

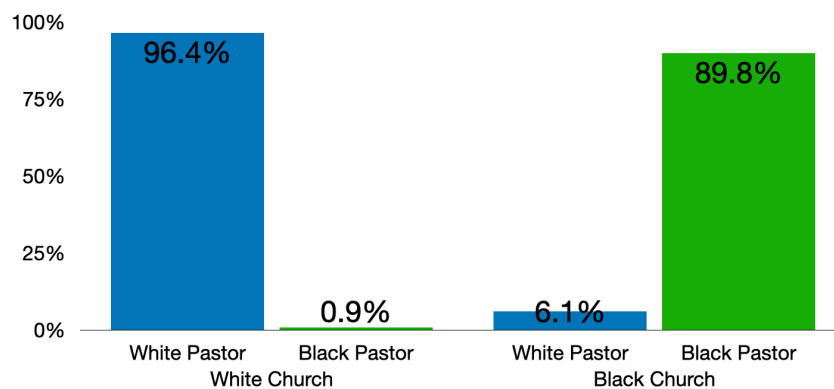
In the study, we wanted to understand clergy inequity from multiple perspectives. We gathered data from a wide range of sources. Our ongoing North Carolina statewide survey of United Methodist clergy provided quantitative data on salary and the racial identification of clergy. We used Annual Conference data from all three conferences in North and South Carolina to help us understand congregational characteristics. We also conducted two focus groups with Black clergy to help center their perspectives in our research, and we conducted nine interviews with District Superintendents to better understand how they make sense of racial inequality among clergy and how they think about race and the appointment process.

What We Found

What did our research reveal? In short, we found large salary disparities between Black and White clergy in North Carolina and that many Black pastors experience the appointment process as unjust. We also observed similar dynamics in South Carolina, despite the much larger proportion of Black churches and Black clergy. As we sought to understand what processes might drive these outcomes, a clear story emerged. In the two Annual Conferences in North Carolina, denominational officials routinely match clergy and congregations by race. In 2014, for example, over 95% of churches had pastors with the same racial identity as the majority

group in the congregation. Because of large and enduring racial disparities present in the United States more generally, matching congregations and clergy by race created divergent career trajectories for Black and White pastors. By race matching clergy and congregations, Black clergy are placed in churches with fewer resources and on a track with fewer opportunities to advance to higher paying and less precarious positions.

Cross-racial appointments in North Carolina are rare
(Percentage of churches, 2014)



The Book of Discipline forbids the consideration of race in the appointment process under the principle of “open itineracy” (as discussed in ¶ 425). We found that cross-racial appointments are very rare, and this is not simply a function of the fact that there are relatively few Black UMC churches in the state. In South Carolina, which has a much higher proportion of African American congregations (about 28%), the situation is largely the same.

The Book of Discipline (2016, ¶ 425)

“...appointments are made without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, disability, marital status or age...Annual conferences shall... emphasize the open nature of itineracy and prepare congregations to receive the gifts and graces of appointed clergy without regard to race, ethnic origin, gender, color, disability, marital status, or age.”

The salary gap (excluding housing allowance) is substantial. Grouping ordained elders, licensed local pastors, and all part- and full-time clergy together, we found that in 2014, White pastors made, on average \$9,051 more than Black pastors. Looking only at solo or lead clergy, White pastors made \$5,950 more than Black pastors. The gap among senior/solo pastors was smaller in South Carolina at \$4,164. Our statistical analyses revealed that salary differences are driven by the fact that Black churches are, on average, smaller and have lower per-member budgets.

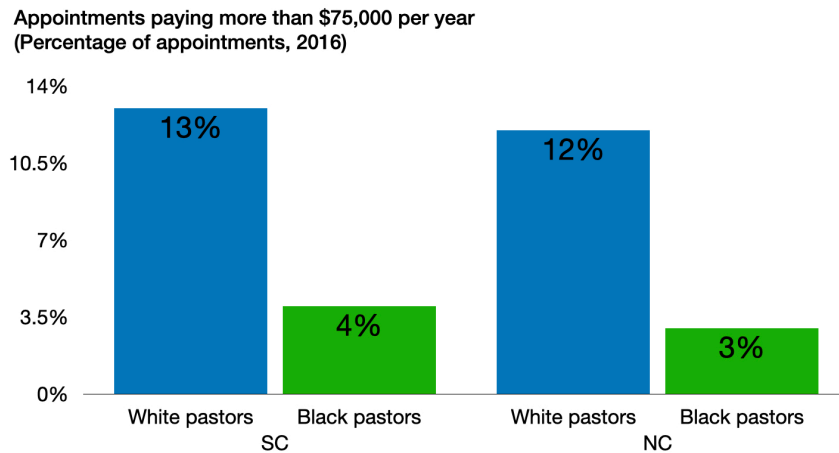
An Unfair System

"I have not quite understood why we have certain people on one salary—our White counterparts at one salary—and yet we're all United Methodist Church and we're on a lower salary because it's only what a church can afford to pay. When we united, that should have been addressed and taken care of. We didn't do it then, so we still deal with it now. And at some point in time, we're going to have to address that, because as a pastor in full connection, [we] should all make the same thing and it shouldn't be the difference that we experience, and it does cause anger. It does cause stress, because ... my family of four wants to eat just like anybody else's family of four. "

As the chart below shows, we found large disparities in who receives larger salaries. About 12% of White clergy in the Carolinas earn more than \$75,000/year. Among Black clergy, only about 4% earn salaries above that level. The ability for churches to offer greater pay is tied to church size and the relative economic status of the church and its members. Owing to historic disparities between Black and White households in the United States, very few Black churches offer large salaries. As one pastor said bluntly, "It's a fact that ... most of our Black churches are economically challenged." Because congregations and pastors are matched by race, Black pastors are systematically excluded from appointments with higher pay and more resources.

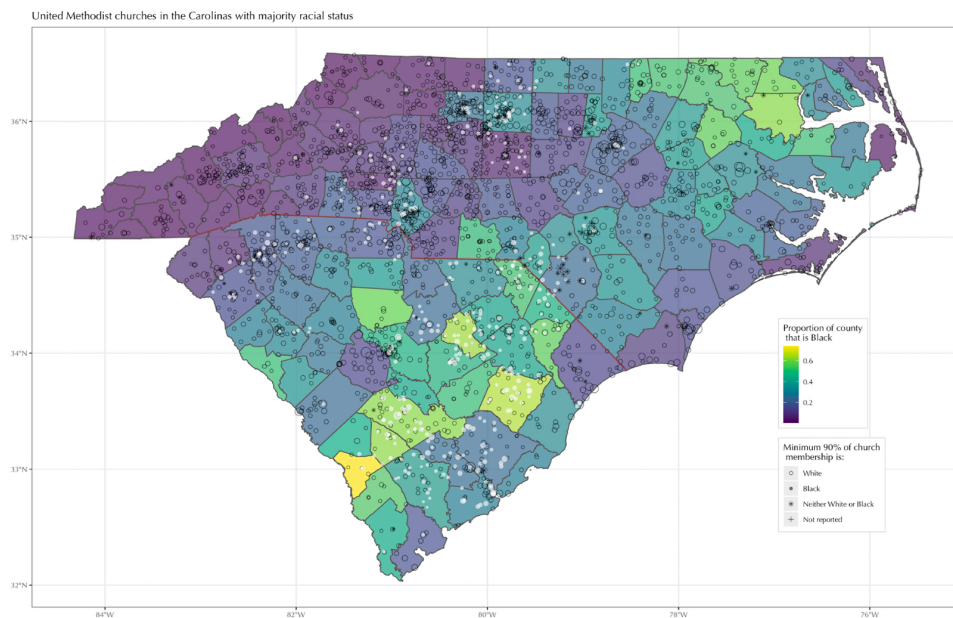
Beyond the financial stresses associated with pay disparities, the broader situation of race-matching adds additional stressors to an already challenging job. Black pastors feel they are in competition with fellow Black clergy for the relatively few better paying appointments. One pastor described it as follows, "One thing is everybody is trying to get everybody else's job." This makes creating supportive relationships with other Black clergy difficult. In addition, as the map shows, Black

churches are clustered into several specific regions. Pastors outside those regions find themselves with fewer fellow Black clergy to turn to for support. As one pastor remarked, “I have been in those appointments where there are only two or three African-American churches and they don’t get along. So they don’t have any fellowship with one another and it makes you feel like you’re out there by yourself.”



In our interviews with District Superintendents, they expressed to us that they were aware of how appointing Black pastors to majority Black congregations creates salary disparities. But, District Superintendents felt caught in a bind. They also shared concerns that cross-racial appointments might put Black pastors in a difficult position due to prejudice they may face in majority-White congregations. For cabinets, this makes expanding the number of cross-racial appointments practically difficult. We note that this sentiment was not shared by Black clergy who, in our focus groups affirmed a willingness to serve in cross-racial appointments, even given the possibility of experiencing interpersonal racism.

In simplest terms, Black pastors did not experience the appointment process as fair. Using the words of one respondent to summarize the situation, **“the trust just isn’t there.”**



Pathways to Improving Racial Equity

In light of these findings, our goal is to help advance the discussions that clergy leaders are already having about these issues. In so doing, we offer two possible changes that we think could chart a pathway to reducing disparities in pay while facilitating a more equitable work environment for clergy. We offer these suggestions knowing that the situation is complex, clergy leaders are already making efforts, and annual conferences will have to work together to generate solutions that improve equity. These suggestions are made from a desire to move beyond just characterizing the problem. While these suggestions are potentially challenging to implement, we think the following ideas can inform discussions about how to improve equity:

1. **Leverage apportionments as a redistributive mechanism to help ensure racial pay equity across congregations.**
2. **Establish a common salary scale based on factors like job performance and years of experience rather than leaving salaries solely up to the discretion of individual congregations.**

In the body of literature on how organizations can reduce salary inequities, re-

search on the public and non-profit sector has found worker morale goes up when salaries are centrally established by clear and transparent formulae. In addition, researchers have noted how non-profit employees are happiest in environments where people with the same level of experience and training are compensated similarly and when overall wage differences between employees in the organization are minimized.

Many of the people we talked to rightly pointed out that reducing the prevalence of race matching in the appointment process might also improve racial inequalities in pay. While this may reduce pay inequities, it does not address the deeper problem where smaller and more resource constrained congregations are excluded from receiving more experienced pastors. A common salary scale allows Black pastors the freedom to serve Black churches without worrying about whether they will face a financial penalty for doing so.

Conclusions

Writing to William Wilberforce in 1791, John Wesley said, "Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it." And while Wesley's wish did eventually get fulfilled, the legacy of slavery continues to this day. Members of communities racialized by the broader society are more likely to be paid less, have poorer working environments, struggle to generate wealth, end up in jail, and live with a chronic disease. Eliminating these disparities takes an enormous amount of sustained and concerted effort at all levels, including policy and systems levels. Our hope is this research can add to the already good work that people across the United Methodist Church are doing to address workplace inequalities among their clergy.

Authors

Prior to receiving his Ph.D. in sociology at Duke University in 2015, David Eagle served for six years as senior pastor at Saanich Community Church (Mennonite Brethren) in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. He also holds an M.Div. from Fresno Pacific Biblical Seminary and a Th.M. from Duke Divinity School. Along with Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, David helps lead the Duke Clergy Health Initiative and is also an Assistant Research Professor at the Duke Global Health Institute. His research focuses on how broader religious changes in North America are impacting congregations and those who lead them. He is Principal Investigator of the Seminary to Early Ministry Study, which is following divinity students through their training and into the first years of their careers.

Collin Mueller is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he is also a faculty associate of the Maryland Population Research Center and holds a courtesy faculty appointment in Health Policy and Management in the School of Public Health. He holds an M.Div. from Duke Divinity School and a Ph.D. in sociology from Duke University. Collin is a John Wesley Fellow, and his work has also been supported by funders including the NSF and NIH. Collin's research focuses on addressing organizational and institutional mechanisms that shape inequalities in health across the life course, with an emphasis on congregations, faith-based safety net organizations, and healthcare settings.

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