CANDIDACY:
HISTORICALLY EXCLUDED REPORT

SPRING, 2023

In the fall of 2022, the Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group (CLDWG) did an online survey to elicit information about the candidacy experience of candidacy individuals who are members of underrepresented and historically excluded groups in the church with the goal of:
Identifying barriers preventing underrepresented populations from getting through candidacy.

The survey received responses from 334 individuals:
- 23% identified as African descent or African National
- 13% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander
- 5% identified as Indigenous
- 21% identified as Latinx
- 17% identified as LGBTQIA+
- 8% identified as living with disability
- 35% identified as other

(Individuals could choose as many options as applied to them. There was no option that included white, male, female or none of the above.)

Linda Bobbitt from Blue Veil Ministries correlated and analyzed the responses from the survey. Her full report can be found on the CLDWG website. Below is a summary:

Five aspects of the candidacy process were identified for comments and responses:
1. Psychological Evaluation
2. Role of the Candidacy Committee, including their cultural fluency
3. Experience of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)
4. Internship
5. Seminary and acquiring a Master's Degree
Psychological Evaluation
While many (40%) found it helpful, there were significant concerns raised that the evaluation did not take into account the individual's culture (31%). The expense in terms of time and money was highlighted as an issue, along with questions about its purpose. Some complained it was not even brought up by the candidacy committee.

Role of the Candidacy Committee
There were both positive and negative experiences expressed about the role of the candidacy committee. It was helpful and supportive for a number of people (60%) but there was significant concern that not only did candidacy committees not have any members of the candidate's demographic group, but also that they did not celebrate the diversity the candidate offered. The same, both positive and negative, experiences applied particularly to relators, how helpful and supportive they were in the process.

Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)
The experience of CPE was an overwhelmingly helpful process in formation for most candidates (73%). However, there were challenges in that CPE sites were hard to find; it was a financial burden for families; that some supervisors were culturally insensitive and even abusive. Several people noted that only people of privilege or those with other assistance could meet the CPE requirement.

Internship
In the “other” responses, when individuals could add their own comments (44%) the most theme was that internship was a good/great experience that was very important in their formation. The second most common theme related to the expense associated with internship, especially the small stipend paid by many congregations which was not a living wage, especially when it did not provide health insurance. In addition there was the expense and disruption of needing to move for a traditional internship site.

Seminary
Different people had very different experiences of seminary. 58% indicated that acquiring a master's was not a “barrier” for my formation, while also questioning the necessity of a degree verses a certificate, the relevance of courses themselves, and the length of the program. One consistent complaint was the amount of money required to attain a degree though scholarship opportunities were noted by several individuals.

Conclusions and Next Steps
The results of this survey indicate three primary areas that deserve greater reflection to address the barriers they present in the formation process for historically excluded groups: CPE, Internship, and the role and operation of the candidacy committee.

Steps could be taken to make CPE and internship experiences more affordable, accessible, and relevant to candidates' future ministry. Work needs to be done to help congregations prepare to receive and welcome candidates from diverse backgrounds.

The effectiveness and relationship between candidates and their candidacy committees varies widely. There is little consistency and accountability across the church. Candidacy Committees have a dual role of being both supportive while also making decisions regarding a candidate's fitness for ministry. More collaboration, rather than having individual synod candidacy committees may be a better way to support candidates.

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