

# UUA Beyond Categorical Thinking Case Studies

Revised August 2020

*Congregational leaders, please make one copy for every eight attendees and give to the facilitator prior to the workshop. Thank you!*

## Race and Ethnicity

### **Case Study #1: BIPOC minister and the single-issue label**

A BIPOC minister is called to a congregation. They are excited about this new call and serving the congregation. There are many in the congregation who are just as excited.

Some hope the minister will finally address racial issues as they have not been brought to light in the congregation well before. Others are patting themselves on the back for calling a minister of color and feel like no further conversation about racism in the congregation is really needed now. This proves the congregation is not racist; the calling of their new minister is proof.

And still others are worried this is all the new minister will preach about - every sermon they will hear will be about race. And what if they (the congregants) say something wrong?

The new minister is between two rocks and a hard place. If the minister were to try and talk about being caught like this, then the one group will view this as proof that they are a single-issue minister.

- *Whose problem is this and how should it be dealt with? How would you respond to this situation? How should the congregation respond?*

### **Case Study #2: Accents of a BIPOC minister**

A congregational Search Committee is afraid to call a minister of Latinx/Hispanic origin who looks good "on paper." Having talked with the minister, the Search Committee noticed the minister's accent. They fear that someone with this accent that might be difficult for some to understand.

The Search Committee decides not to consider further this person who seems to be their best match otherwise because of the number of people in the congregation with some hearing difficulties which came through "loud and clear" in both the congregational survey and from real life experience on Sunday mornings.

- *How would you approach this situation?*

### **Case Study #3: Will we be next?**

Someone says, "If we call a person who is of Middle Eastern descent, then do we run the risk of being targeted for violence by some people in the community? Maybe we shouldn't call that person?"

Someone else says, "I was wondering about violence if we called someone who was transgender or queer."

A third person says, "I think anyone who is radical will likely make us a target."

- *How would you respond to this conversation?*

#### **Case Study #4: Where should the minister live?**

A BIPOC minister in the middle of candidating week is talking with a congregant about where to live. Living closer to the congregation's building is very expensive. The minister wonders about a couple of other neighborhoods. The congregant responds, "But what about (and names a neighborhood further away)? Wouldn't you want to be closer to your people?"

- *If you were listening to this conversation, how would you respond?*

#### **Case Study #5: Our minister won't look like us**

Someone tells a Search Committee member, "We should not really be looking at a BIPOC minister. They won't fit in here and stay long. Our congregation and community are so white. It would be unfair to the minister."

- *If you were on the Search Committee, how would you respond to this person?*

#### **Case Study #6: Staff diversity**

A congregation is in search looking for a new minister. The Search Committee, after meeting with the assistant minister (who's African American), enters into discussion with itself. One member reports that they are being repeatedly approached about finding balance and that there are some concerned about the need to have a more "traditional minister" in the senior role. Another member reports that several people have said the new senior minister has to be white to balance the assistant minister.

- *If you were a part of this conversation, what does this make you think about?*
- *Would this also be true if you had a prominent staff person who is BIPOC?*
- *What would your concerns be if your congregation's staff is all white and people said the congregation must have a BIPOC minister next?*
- *Does this also apply to other identities like gender/sexual orientation/disability) if the congregation already has a minister with a particular identity?*

#### **Case Study #7: Microaggressions**

A Search Committee is in a heated discussion over what to say about a BIPOC minister. The congregation has reported their deep appreciation and affection for the minister. Reports have gotten back to the Search Committee that one of several reasons the minister left was because of the almost daily microaggressions they experienced and were just exhausted by them. Also reported is that the minister simply gave up asking for help because they encountered three repeated responses:

"That's just Virgil. We ignore him. You should too."

"Oh. Did you do anything about it with them directly?"

"I'm sorry that happened."

The Search Committee is wondering what it should do with this information, both in the congregation and in their search materials.

- *If you were on the Search Committee, what would you recommend?*

### **Case Study #8: Responding in the moment**

A minister of Native American/First Nations/Indigenous descent is meeting the social justice committee for the first time. People go around the room and introduce themselves. The last person to speak raises one hand and simply says, "How!"

All the people in the room turn toward the minister to see how she will respond.

- *If you were in that room, what would you do next?*

### **Disability/Mental Health/Health Concerns**

### **Case Study #9: Disability, depression, and our fears around it**

A minister on medication for depression keeps this information from the Search Committee. The minister is discovered by one of the Search Committee members taking it one day during the candidating week.

The minister is worried about discussing this so early in the ministry. "Will the congregation be able to see beyond this one piece of identity?" The minister asks the person who saw them taking their medication to not to tell anyone.

- *If you were the person who was asked to keep silence, how would you respond?*

### **Case Study #10: Accessibility of a person using a scooter**

A minister who uses a scooter to get long distances is selected to be a candidate at your congregation. Someone says upon seeing the ministerial candidate that "the minister will be too difficult for the congregation because the building isn't accessible and besides, the minister will have an agenda to make this their only issue." The leader adds that "it will cost too much to make the building accessible for one person, and we can't afford that right now."

The person adds that "while this undoubtedly sounds terrible, it is not something the congregation should be forced to deal with now." And the person then wonders if this minister will have the stamina to do the job.

- *If some leader in the congregation told you this, how would you respond?*

### **Case Study #11: How smart is a minister with a learning disability?**

A newly settled minister begins work in the congregation. Upon learning the new minister has a learning disability, someone in the congregation asks the Search Committee if the minister is smart enough to be their minister and will the sermons be intellectual enough - especially after the first couple of sermons were so personal.

- *What would you say to this person?*

### **Case Study #12: Taking care**

In checking references, a Search Committee learns that the minister lives with Bipolar. In talking it over with the rest of the Search Committee, a member of the committee asks, "Will we have to take care of the minister? Aren't they likely to be erratic?" Another member says, "We'll just have to remind them to take their medication. I'd be happy to do that." Another person says no one who lives with Bipolar should be a minister.

- *If you were on the Search Committee, how would you respond to this conversation?*

### **Case Study #13: Neurodiversity**

A minister identifies themselves as being neurodiverse and reports that this means that they are less likely to look directly at someone when talking to them. After a video interview, a search committee member says, "I don't think this minister is a good fit for us. They never looked at the screen once. I felt no connection with the minister as a result."

- *If you were on that Search Committee, how would you respond to this?*

## **Gender**

### **Case Study #14: A minister who is transgender**

One Search Committee member is advocating for a minister who seems to be perfect for their congregation. Someone else on the Search Committee notices the minister identifies as transgender, though they wouldn't have known that by the pictures that were enclosed.

There are several strong voices on the Search Committee who suggest that while this minister may be qualified, the congregation isn't ready for a transgender minister; "all you have to do is look at the congregational survey."

One person says most people in the congregation don't understand what transgender really means. Additionally, it is said that this community is way too conservative and not ready for a transgender minister.

- *If you were on the Search Committee, how would you approach this conversation?*

### **Case Study #15: A cultural stereotype around gender**

A minister of Indian (South Asian) descent is a candidate for the congregation. Several women have expressed concern to some congregation members that they wonder if he will be sexist to women. They cite several people they know and movies they have seen where they have noticed sexism in Indian males in relationships with women.

One woman says she'd like to talk to the minister about this, but she is afraid to ask him directly. She wonders if there is a good way to ask.

- *What would you say to this woman?*

### **Case Study #16: Pronouns**

A minister has introduced themselves as gender nonbinary and has said they don't use he or she as a pronoun to describe themselves.

In the Search Committee meeting (where the minister is not present), someone suggests that all name tags should ask people for their pronouns. Someone else gets frustrated and responds, "We shouldn't do that. We shouldn't change our name tags for one person." Someone else says, "I think this is going to upset some of our older people. I've heard some of these folks constantly get it wrong, and sometimes I think this is intentional."

- *How would you respond to this conversation if you were on the Search Committee?*

### **Case Study #18: Probing questions**

A minister who identifies as gender nonbinary is asked by a member during candidating week, "But what gender were you born?" by a member of the congregation. Someone else asks, "So when are you going to really transition?"

- *If you overheard either of these questions being asked of a potential minister for your congregation, how would you respond?*

### **Case Study #19: How will you act?**

A woman minister is asked during candidating week by a congregant, "We're hoping you'll be less angry than our last woman minister. She kept getting mad at the men and they stopped coming to church." Someone else says, "We hope you'll do some intellectual sermons for us. We really like that."

- *If you overheard either comment, how would you respond?*

### **Socioeconomic Class**

#### **Case Study #20: Previous working class job**

During candidating week, the congregation learns that the minister has a background working in what is considered a working class job (road construction, hair stylist, and janitor). The minister is told by someone in the congregation, "You don't need to talk about your former work. That would just be putting yourself down."

- *If you overheard that, how would you respond to the situation?*

#### **Case Study #21: Class and location**

A historic congregation is in the older part of town, now referred to as a working class neighborhood. In a conversation about what is needed in the next minister, one congregant says, "We need a minister who will be able to relate to the neighborhood and help us become a part of the community." To which someone else responds, "I want a minister with whom I'll feel comfortable; someone who is smart."

- *Whose problem is this and what you do? How would you respond to this situation?*

## **Sexual Orientation**

### **Case Study #22: Queerness**

A minister has described themselves as queer. Several older members of the congregation say they are offended by the word, they were told never to use the word, and they have indicated they will vote against the minister for using that word to describe themselves.

- *If you were a member of the congregation who heard them say this, how would you respond?*

### **Case Study #23: The bisexual minister and promiscuity**

A single, bisexual minister is selected to be your candidate. During candidating week, the board chair is told secondhand that there are congregational members who are afraid that he is going to sleep around in the congregation. Several have wondered what kind of role model he will be for children.

- *Whose problem is this and how should it be dealt with? How would you respond if you were the board chair?*

### **Case Study #24: Will we become a gay church if we call a gay minister?**

A gay minister arrives for candidating week. One member says, "So you're the homosexual. Do you preach sermons on anything else?"

Another member asks if he thinks he will bring in a lot of new gay members to the church. He replies, "Would you ask a straight minister that same question?" The questioner says, "Why would I? I'm just concerned we'll be known as the gay church."

- *How would you respond to either member?*

### **Case Study #25: Discrimination no longer exists**

A candidating minister who is married to someone of the same gender identity is told by a member of the Search Committee, "We don't have homophobia in the congregation. You won't have to worry about that. There are some members focusing on racism and transphobia in the community, where those are bigger problems."

- *If you heard someone say this, how would you respond?*

## Age

### **Case Study #26: It must be said**

During candidating week, a female candidate is told, "You're very wise for someone so young." "I don't think you'll be known to help an old person like me." "Your sermon could have been more intellectual." "Will you leave us to have kids?"

- *How would you respond if you overheard someone asking any of these questions?*

### **Case Study #27: Too young? Too old?**

A congregational Search Committee is looking at a candidate who seems like a good match. However, one person is quite vocal about the fact that they need a minister who will stay with them and provide stability over the next decade. This person fears someone in their 60s will retire on them and they'll have to be in search too soon.

Another Search Committee member is concerned that the one rising star they are looking at is too young and green at 27 to be a good minister for them. "They don't know enough. They haven't enough life experience to be a minister, especially since so many of us are over 60."

- *Whose problem is this and what you do? How would you respond to this situation?*

## Miscellaneous

### **Case Study #28: Only certain ministers attract families**

Upon hearing the new minister is (BIPOC, lesbian, disabled, or a combination of these identities), someone says to you, "But we need a minister who will attract families here!"

- *Whose problem is this and how should it be dealt with? How would you respond to this situation?*

### **Case Study #29: We've done that before**

There are several members of the congregation who say the congregation shouldn't call a minister with a particular marginalized identity because "that's what our previous minister was."

- *How would you respond to this person?*

#### **Case Study/Question for Discussion:**

Would there be resistance to a minister who was single?

#### **Case Study/Question for Discussion:**

Would there be resistance to a minister who is also a military reservist?

**Case Study/Question for Discussion:**

Would there be resistance to a minister who describes themselves as “fat”?

**Case Study/Question for Discussion:**

Would there be resistance to a minister who is a cancer survivor?

**Case Study/Question for Discussion:**

Would there be resistance to a co-ministry team?

**Case Study/Question for Discussion:**

Would there be resistance if the minister were a single parent?