

UUA Beyond Categorical Thinking Case Studies

Case Study #1: African-American minister and the single issue label

An African-American minister is called to a congregation. She is excited about her new call and serving the congregation. There are many in the congregation who are just as excited.

Some hope she 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. The calling of their new minister is proof that there is no racism in the congregation.

And still others are worried this is all she will preach about-every sermon they will hear will be about race.

One member is concerned that the minister will have a chip on their shoulder and be angry, and only shame them on race issues.

And others are concerned that the minister has moved to a very white congregation and very white community and will they be able to fit in here?

The new minister is between 4 rocks and a hard place. If she addresses this issue, then one group will view this as proof that she is a single-issue minister.

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

Case Study #2: Disability, depression and our fears around it

A minister on medication for depression keeps this information from the search committee.

He is discovered taking it one day during the candidating week.

He says he's afraid that if he is authentic with his congregation this early, they will not be able to see beyond this one piece of his identity. He asks the person who sees him not to tell anyone.

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

Case Study #3: Accessibility of person using a wheelchair

A minister in a wheelchair is selected to be a candidate at your church.

Someone says upon seeing the ministerial candidate that she will be too difficult on the congregation because of the building, and, besides, the minister will have an agenda. Not only that, but 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 also wonders if this person will have the stamina to do the job. The complaining person is someone who has a lot of influence within the congregation.

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

Case Study #4: 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 #5: Accents of a person of color

A congregational search committee is afraid to call a minister of Latina/o/Hispanic origin who looks good "on paper."

They fear that someone with an accent that might be difficult for some to understand. The search committee decides not to look at 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.

Whose problem is this and how should it be dealt with? If you were on the search committee how would you respond?

Case Study #6: 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 don't understand what transgender really means in the congregation and notes how the one transgender member of the congregation is barely tolerated in the congregation.

Additionally, it is said that this community is way too conservative and not ready for a transgender minister.

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

Case Study #7: Will we become a gay church if we call a gay minister?

A gay minister arrives for candidating week.

Early on, he is asked 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."

The questioner is also saying this to other members of the congregation, sharing the concern about becoming a gay church.

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

Case Study #8: A cultural stereotype around gender

A minister of Indian (South Asian) decent 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 about this, but she is afraid to ask him directly. She wonders if there is a good way to ask.

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

Case Study #9: How smart is a minister with a learning disability

A newly settled minister begins his work in the congregation.

Upon learning the new minister has a learning disability, someone in the congregation asks the search committee if they are smart enough to be the minister and will the sermons be intellectual enough-especially after the first couple of sermons were so personal?

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

Case Study #10: Only certain ministers attract families

Upon hearing the new minister is (a person of color, lesbian, or with a disability 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 #11: Will we be next?

A person in the congregation expresses fear about what might happen should someone decide to violently target the congregation for their liberal views on gays and lesbians.

How would you address this fear?

Case Study #12: We've done that before

There are several members of the congregation who say the congregation shouldn't call a minister of (pick your identity-African-American, lesbian, hearing impaired, etc.) because that's what our previous minister was.

How would you respond to this person?

Case Study #13: Responding at the moment

A minister of Native American/First Nations 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.

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

Case Study #14: The pulpit

The church was on the green in the heart of town. It had been constructed of white clapboard shingles with a steeple spire that held a bell. The sanctuary had wooden pews with doors that closed and latched. The white pulpit with gold gilt trim was up a winding staircase.

When I attended the worship service for the first time, I was shocked and pleased when one woman sitting a few pews ahead of me stood and announced that she was starting a support group for lesbians. I was used to living in a city and had been a lifelong UU but, somehow this invitation didn't seem to fit the image that the building or the town gave.

I was pleased that the building had been retrofitted with an elevator that led to the Sunday School classrooms and the entrance from the parking lot. Not long after I signed the book to become a member of this congregation I was encouraged to teach an adult RE class about disability rights. The attendance was low, but I was pleased that one of the regular attendees was the minister. I plunged into helping with fundraising events and lay-led services. The minister performed a service of union for my partner and me a few years later.

But a few years after I joined the church the minister announced that he would be leaving. Another congregation had called him. A meeting was announced to have a preliminary discussion about what people wanted in a new minister and I attended. We talked about social action and diversity in church membership, openness to a minister of color or a gay minister. Then the President of the congregation announced, as if he wanted to make sure everyone understood, "Of course we couldn't have a disabled minister because of the stairs up to the pulpit." Everyone in the meeting nodded their heads in affirmation, except for me.

What would you do/say if you were a member of this congregation and the board president had said this? Should the church give up on calling a minister with a disability because of the pulpit?

Case Study #15: 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?

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

Age

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 we need a minister who will stay with us and provide stability over the next decade and 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?

Other questions to consider, if time allows:

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