

Lucia Ann McSpadden, *Meeting God at the Boundaries: Cross-Cultural-Cross-Racial Clergy Appointments* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 2003), 148 pp.

United States is increasingly becoming a multicultural, multiracial society and most mainline Protestant denominations are striving to be more inclusive. In the 1990s, the United Methodist Church began to use its clergy appointment process to foster greater inclusivity in the church by intentionally appointing clergy to congregations across racial and cultural boundaries.

Meeting God at the Boundaries is the result of a three year study aimed at gathering and analyzing data on this experiment. The study consisted largely of interviews with clergy, congregations, judicatory leaders, as well as focus groups in several congregations. Lucia Ann McSpadden, who has extensive professional and academic experience in cross cultural issues, summarizes the results of this study in an easy to read, practical, and insightful volume.

For those responsible for the education, supervision, and care of clergy and congregations, the findings of this book are indispensable. Its insights are helpful to all churches and denominations who are sincerely trying to become more inclusive. The strength of this book is the wealth of quotes and stories from real people involved in this process. McSpadden uses these quotes and stories to illustrate key concepts and models about culture. While many of the concepts from the studies in culture were familiar to me, I found them illuminated and personalized in ways I had not previously experienced. Her description of the stages in the movement from ethnocentrism to intercultural sensitivity to be a new and helpful framework that mapped out the process that both individuals and congregations go through in this journey. This book should be required reading for any church or clergyperson about to enter into a cross cultural or cross racial ministry. It would also be helpful reading for those charged with caring for clergypersons and congregations. As one whose ministry is the education and training of future ministers, I found the section on "Clergy Qualities" in the concluding chapter to be a concise and pointed summary of those traits that my colleagues and I in theological education need to be fostering in future clergypersons. I did note two deficits in the book. First, the issue of theological differences was not focused on as a distinctive issue in clergy

appointments and secondly, clergy sexual orientation as a inclusivity issue, which has become more of a focus since the 1990s, was also absent. Overall, the author has a realistic and yet positive view of the challenge of appointing clergy across cultural and racial boundaries. Her overarching conclusion is the importance of relationships.

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THEME: THE NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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In recent decades, greater attention has been given to the role and importance of story in a variety of disciplines. In psychotherapy, for example, narrative therapy has emerged as a distinctive approach to the understanding and healing of persons. Those who are responsible for the formation and supervision of religious professionals resonate with this emphasis as well. Because religious literature often comes in the form of story or narrative, the form of narrative has become a significant part of religious reflecting. Stories shape lives and narratives provide the framework for the human journey.

Volume 35 of *Reflective Practice*, (including 25 volumes of *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry*), will examine the use of narrative around these questions: "How has this emphasis on narrative shaped, or even re-shaped, our work as a theological educators, ministerial supervisors, or spiritual mentors? How do we employ story in the work of formation and supervision? How might students be encouraged to self-reflect critically on the stories they tell in ministerial formation? How does the multicultural and diverse religious perspectives of our age interface with this emphasis upon the narrative?" Articles around this theme, as well as essays outside the theme, are welcome.