

Pastoral Profiling: Break Free From the Mold

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The ministry position profile reads: male, married with children, 30-50 years of age, seminary degree, minimum of five years experience. For a few people, for a brief period in their lives, that profile fits.

But what if you are 57, single, female, or any other deviation from that profile? What gifted ministers are overlooked because the field of vision is so narrow? We can all name extremely gifted, well-educated, effective ministers that have been placed in the “no” pile simply because of their age, gender or other departure from the mold.

Ultimately, we all lose. Eventually, we are all excluded if inclusion is based on such criteria.

We are excluded because we are too old or because we are too young. We are excluded because we are single or because we are married. We are excluded because we have children or because we are without children. We are excluded because we are female or because we are male. We are excluded because we have light-colored skin or because our skin is dark.

As clergy, we often hear these words from a search committee: “We don’t want him; he’s too old. We don’t want her; we want a man in this position. We don’t want him; he’s single. We don’t want her; she has young children. We don’t want him; he doesn’t fit the ‘profile.’”

We say faith is for all. We even say church leadership is for all. We say God *includes*. Actually, God says God includes. Over and over again the Scriptures tell us that God embraces the “outsider.” First Samuel reveals that “God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the LORD looks at the heart” (16:7, NCV).

Where do we get what we *say* and what we *do* to match up? It happens in congregations that are willing to think “outside the box.” It happens in congregations that look at the person more than the profile. It happens in congregations that open themselves to see gifts and abilities rather than surface appearances. It happens in congregations that allow the winds of the Spirit to blow wherever and on whomever the Spirit chooses.

Then, instead of being excluded from places of ministry, we are included as partners in ministry. Instead of a closed window, we experience a fresh breeze of the Spirit.

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