

UUA Beyond Categorical Thinking Case Studies

Revised August 2017

To Congregational Leader: Please make one copy for every eight attendees and give to the facilitator prior to the workshop. Thank you!

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

An African-American minister is called to a congregation. They (He/She) 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.

The new minister is between 2 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 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. The minister is discovered 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 this person to not to tell anyone.

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

Case Study #3: Accessibility of person using a wheelchair

A minister who uses a scooter to get long distances is selected to be a candidate at your church. 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 person will have the stamina to do the job.

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

Case Study #5: Accents of a person of color

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 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.

- *How would you approach this situation?*

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. 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 #7: 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 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 #8: 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 #9: 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 even gay or lesbian or bi. "

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 #10: Responding at 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?*

Case Study #11: Where should the minister live?

A minister of color 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 #12: Pronouns

A minister has introduced themselves 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 preferred 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 #13: Our Minister Won't Look Like Us

Someone tells a search committee member, "We should not really be looking at a minister of color. 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 #14: 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 you putting yourself down.”

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

Case Study #15: Take Care

In checking references, a search committee learns that the minister lives with being 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 is bipolar should be a minister.

- *If you were on the search committee, how would you respond to this conversation?*

Case Study #16: Queer

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?*

Other case studies and questions if there is time:

Case Study #17: 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 #18: 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 #19: 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?*

Case Study #20: 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 #21: 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 #22: 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 #23: 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 #24: 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/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 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?