

Equity Training Module for Search Teams

For Pastoral Relations Liaisons

Note: This Word document accompanies the Search Team Equity Training PowerPoint presentation, also available on the liaison section of the website:

<https://shiningwatersregionalcouncil.ca/pastoral-relations/liaisons/> (scroll to bottom of page to find it)

A. Introduction (2 minutes)

Slide 1: Cover slide

So thank you everyone for this opportunity to be with your search committee. What I'd like to do for the next 30 minutes or so is explore with you issues of equity in your search. You as a committee are moving into a process where you are going to both pursue ministers, recruit ministers whom you think would be a good match for your needs as a CoF, and you are going to have ministers, hopefully, pursue you. And at some point you are going to make a very important decision, which is to recommend one candidate to your congregation.

Let's take a moment to center ourselves and recognize God's presence among us:

Prayer:

God who created Babel and Pentecost—the complexity and diversity of your creation is evident all around us in the song of birds, the arrays of flowers and trees, the incredible variations of animals, the richness of cultures and languages. Give us your feelings, your perceptions, and your heart as we examine ourselves for biases that can knowingly and unknowingly cause us to reject others. Give us humility to be open with each other. Guide us as we learn about equity and how to apply it to our search committee work. Amen.

B. Equity Training Goal (3 minutes)

Slide 2: Equity Training Goal

Here is a goal I propose for this session:

To identify and address our biases so that search team members are open to the skills and gifts of every prospective ministry personnel in the pastoral relations process.

Take a second to reflect on that goal statement: what personal reaction do you have? Or what question emerges for you?

Discussion

C. What is bias? (10 minutes)

Slide 3 - WordCloud

So I know that “bias” has a negative connotation in our every day use of it. So if someone says to us, you’re biased against _____, our natural reaction often is some version of a defensive posture: “you misunderstand, no I’m not biased, let me explain”, etc..

Unconscious biases are attitudes and stereotypes accumulated throughout life that can influence our decision making, particularly when something must be decided quickly. And as a search team, you will need to make relatively quick decisions. For example, you have three interviews to do, with an hour for each interview. In that short space of time, you need to assess a candidate, and determine whether you will go forward with them, or to end the exploration of their suitability as your minister.

But when we think about bias, its important to recognize that we all carry various kinds of biases as a result of our educations, our social milieus, and so forth. And when we do recognize that, it’s not to take comfort in the fact that if everyone carries biases, then its okay for me to have a bias, but rather to see the bigger picture: that through our socialization process, our formal and informal educations, our cultural milieus, we begin to carry some baggage with us, some filters. No one lives without biases. It’s recognizing them and mitigating them that is important.

(Slide 4 and 5 – Power analysis word cloud and Privilege and Non-Privilege)

One of the ways that we can help identify our biases is to think about our own position of status and power and privilege in society. A tool we can use to help us do that is called a “Power Analysis”, and so I’d like you to take a few minutes to use this tool to help gain some perspective on your own identity, and how that identity informs how we see others and how others see us:

(you can give search teams some time to do this in the training, or send it out ahead of time)

So in looking at the results, was there anything that surprised you? Does it give you any information that would help you as a member of the search team to be more conscious of bias?

Let’s talk about bias for a moment. I’d like to share four different kinds of bias that could enter into a search process.

Slide 6 – 4 types of bias

1. Motivational Bias: see slide for definition

Example:

The interviewers are motivated to call or appoint someone who shares their first language. As a result, they are motivated to hear the responses of interviewees who share their first language as being better than those from interviewees who do not share the same first language, even if this is not the case.

Question: You have indicated in your position description that the candidate must have strong oral communication skills. How will that qualification impact on a candidate who speaks English with an accent not familiar to you?

2. Confirmatory Bias: see slide for definition

Example:

An interviewer has heard that a candidate has a passion for justice and has been experienced by a colleague as aggressive and in-your-face. As a result, the interviewer is highly sensitized to any words, tone of voice, or non-verbal actions that support this preconceived idea.

Question: You have agreed as a search committee that the minister you hire must be a strong leader. How does that qualification impact on a candidate who is a soft-spoken woman?

3. Cognitive Bias

Example:

An interviewer believes that someone with something important to say has prepared in advance and can speak quickly, concisely, and articulately about their position. When an interviewee speaks slowly and with many pauses, the interviewer decides the person is unable to think on their feet, can't process information quickly, and is not the right match for the community of faith.

Question: Your position description indicates that the ideal candidate will have excellent organization skills. How does that qualification skill impact on a candidate who comes to the interview with clothes that mismatch in your opinion?

4. Observational Bias

Example:

An interviewer observes that a candidate has multiple body piercings. In this interviewer's interpretive experience, people with body piercings are independent minded, non-conformist and uncooperative. This interviewer is affected by their observations in how they receive and record what the interviewee says based on the simple fact that the candidate has body piercings.

Question: The congregation has agreed that the minister to be hired will "understand and build on the traditional culture of our community of faith". How will this preference impact on a candidate who is racialized?

It's important to note that these biases can and do also intersect with many other kinds of biases. Gender biases. Racist biases. Ableist biases. Homophobic biases. We'll look in more detail at issues of racist bias in a moment.

D. Bias and the search process (5 minutes)

Slide 7 – How might a search process include bias against some ministry personnel?

Question: How might a search process bias against some ministry personnel? Think briefly about all the steps of a search:

1. Developing your position description and Living Faith Story
2. Putting together your search team
3. Recruiting through advertisements
4. Searching ministers' profiles

5. Shortlisting and choosing your interviewees
6. Interviewing
7. Discerning and choosing your candidate for recommendation
8. Presenting your recommendation to the congregation

E. Racism Bias (10 minutes)

Slide 8 – Racism Bias and the Church

One of the biases that I'd like to explore with you is one that is unfortunately deeply embedded in society, our institutions, and in ourselves. This is the bias based on race. Racism. I'd like to show a short video that comes to us from our friends in the United Church of Christ in the U.S. As you view the video, be sensitive to what strikes a chord with you. We'll discuss it briefly after.

(play video up to minute 4:11) [Stretching Beyond Racism on Vimeo](#)

Question for discussion:

Are you open to a minister whose skin colour/racial identity is different from your own?

F: Conclusion: (5 minutes)

Slide 9 – Our challenge

How will you ask each other hard questions about your biases in a way that is compassionate, respectful, and open to the possibility of mutual transformation?

What commitments do you want to make to each other as a search team when it comes to equity issues and your search?

How can we overcome unconscious bias? We can slow down our decision and query our first reactions. We can monitor and challenge each other because we see bias more easily in others than in ourselves. Challenge, and be challenged.

Takeaways:

1. Bias is ingrained and absorbed in us through socialization.
2. Bias is largely unconscious. Training and group cooperation can make our biases visible.
3. Bias can be countered through education and mutual accountability, so that bias in decision-making is mitigated.

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