

DO CAREER CENTERS HAVE ANYTHING TO OFFER MINORITIES IN MINISTRY?

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While there appears to be a gradual increase in the number of career centers around the country offering guidance and services to persons working within the ministry, there does not appear to be an increase in the number of minorities served by such centers. Indeed, the percentage of minorities served by career centers is extremely small in comparison to the number of minorities functioning in pastoral or other professional church positions in this country.

It may be true that there are many minorities that are not aware of the services that are offered by these centers. It is, however, also true that in general, minorities appear to be apprehensive about utilizing services as offered by career centers. There are several contributing reasons.

First, minorities generally tend to be apprehensive about the counseling process and certainly may have questions about the ability of those staffing such career centers to have a full understanding of their particular problems that minorities experience in working in ministry.

Secondly, many career centers utilize multiple test instruments, and minorities tend to be doubtful about the applicability to them of test results.

Thirdly, minorities may have serious concerns about the actual purpose of career centers and, in many instances, particularly in some independent denominations, may feel that career centers will question the call of minority members or discourage minorities from entering the ministry.

From experience in one particular career center, it appears that there are some benefits offered through such career centers that minorities may not have considered:

- 1) It is important to remember that assessment by such centers is not totally dependent upon test results. While numerous psychological assessments may be utilized in the process of career counseling, the primary function of those tests is more geared towards helping the person or the client to get a better understanding of his or her own psychological makeup and/or functioning at the time of the assessment. The expectation is never that psychological tests will be 100 percent correct in their assessments, but many of those tests provide information or data that enlightens persons in areas that they may never have considered before.
- 2) Such centers offer concentrated or extended contact with a client as opposed to a brief contact or one-hour session with the remaining data determined primarily by

test results. The fact that many of these programs are over several days allows opportunity for both the staff and the client to develop better rapport, to have more of an opportunity to develop a trusting relationship, to allow opportunity to explore areas, to reflect upon those areas, and to meet again to reassess, explore further or discuss. Such career programs also generally include extensive background information which allows clients to begin to reflect upon significant events and issues in their lives - even before reaching the career center. All of that time and involvement allows for clearer understanding of the client both by the center staff and by the client.

- 3) Many career centers also offer involvement with staff who have had an opportunity to interact with a multitude of persons who are in ministry so that their understanding of the issues and difficulties and complexities that one may experience in ministry is extensive. In some instances, those staff persons have attended seminary, have been pastors of congregations, or have been involved in pastoral counseling and related fields, all of which, again, provides the minority in ministry an opportunity to interact with someone who can understand the issues that they may be experiencing. Additionally, many of the career counseling programs provide clients an opportunity to interact not only with counselors but also with consulting psychologists who may give a different frame of reference to clients and allow them to explore areas in a different way.
- 4) Such career centers are not necessarily designed to challenge or to question one's call to ministry, but to provide an experience that allows one to explore issues, share difficulties and concerns, and in many respects, to solidify one's call to the ministry. For those who may experience some uncertainties about the call, it is also an opportunity to explore with an impartial listener one's issues and concerns and to receive feedback that may be helpful in reaching a decision.
- 5) Finally, career centers offer minorities an opportunity to gain some understanding of issues that may be inherent in ministry regardless of race, denomination, or other affiliations. It is important for everyone in ministry to have an understanding of issues such as their leadership styles, interaction or interpersonal skills, self-esteem or view of themselves, understanding of use or abuse of power, managing of conflict, balancing time between personal and professional needs, family issues that may emanate from one's involvement in ministry, financial difficulties or issues that may arise, how one resolves problems whether professional or personal, how one handles burnout, how one looks at or addresses his or her own counseling skills, attempting to gain some understanding of one's own emotional functioning and how that may be affecting one's ministry. Such issues are common in ministry, and career centers with extended assessment programs and sufficient follow-up contacts can assist minorities in ministry, as well as others, in recognizing, understanding, and developing some plan to address these significant issues.

In summary, career centers appear to have much to offer minorities in ministry in light of the fact that many of their difficulties and issues are common to all those involved in the task of

ministering to others. The extensive time allotted for such assessments, the experience of staff, the variety of staff which allows for different perspectives, and follow-up sessions that are available all indicate that these career centers could be beneficial to minorities as well. It would be both helpful and wise for such career centers to increase their efforts to enlighten minorities and incorporate them in the offering of services. Again, there are tens of thousands of minorities presently serving in ministries in different capacities in this country who could benefit from such services.

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