

To Ministerial Candidates  
From Emily Melcher, Liaison to Candidates  
Sept. 2009

In Sept. 2009, I had the privilege of participating in the MFC meetings as Liaison to Candidates. I want you to know that members of the MFC make an extraordinary commitment of time and energy to Unitarian Universalism. I experienced them as well-prepared, thoughtful and conscientious in their deliberations.

In embarking on the path to UU ministry, you have certainly recognized the importance of your own personal, academic and ministerial preparation. In light of my own interview with the MFC and my participation as liaison, there's something else I'd like to impress upon you: In embarking on the path to UU ministry, you're entering into a relationship of accountability with an institution (the UUA) that neither begins nor ends with your interview with the MFC. The MFC's role is to mediate that relationship of accountability, and they, too, are accountable to the UUA and to Unitarian Universalism. This means that the MFC, and you, are all on the side of Unitarian Universalism.

Still, there's no doubt about it: seeing the MFC is tremendously anxiety-provoking for most people. You have – or will have – spent years of your life and tens of thousands of dollars preparing for ministry, and it can't help but feel as though the MFC holds your future in their hands. Perhaps it is helpful to realize that your visit to the MFC is not the moment at which you will finally be found “fit” or “unfit” as a human being or a minister, but an important step in the process of a relationship of accountability to an institution.

What does it mean to be accountable to this particular institution? It means investing in your relationship to your local congregation(s), your ministerial colleagues, your district and the UUA throughout your candidacy and beyond. It means addressing any recommendations made by the RSCC and any concerns evident in your career assessment, evaluations and recommendations. It means giving thoughtful and thorough attention to your packet, so that the MFC will know that you have acquired the competencies necessary for effective Unitarian Universalist ministry. Ultimately, it means showing up for your interview as a Unitarian Universalist minister, looking to the MFC for support rather than approval.

You should be aware that the MFC's support falls along a continuum, ranging from recognition that a candidate is ready to enter our ministry to discouragement from further preparation for our ministry. The MFC may have recommendations which must be fulfilled before the candidate is granted Preliminary Fellowship or during the period of Preliminary Fellowship, or it may have broader concerns which the candidate will need to address before a return interview. Some outcomes are joyous; some are painful. Some are anticipated; others come as a

surprise. Any of these outcomes, and your reaction to it, can teach you something about yourself as a person and as a minister accountable to an institution. The commitment to learning through it all is, in itself, an indicator of your sense of accountability.

The best advice I can give you is this: *Hold yourself accountable*, not only for your personal development and ministerial preparation, but also for your place in Unitarian Universalism and its institutions. If you can do this, I believe you will be well prepared not only for your interview, but for our ministry.