

Ben Robins October 2020 MFC First-Year Minister Emissary Report

It's been a year since I saw the MFC myself. I found MFC First-Year Minister Emissary reports to be very helpful in my own preparation, and I hope this report is helpful for you.

After each interview, after a breath, we started our deliberation by listing descriptors of the candidate with a focus on what we loved. I'll do that here, describing the panel I was on: I found the panel to be loving, generous, aware of who is the "we," insightful, thorough, both tough and kind. I'll also note that the moment before we welcomed each candidate into the interview, we did a blessing of them and their ministry. I felt that we held this blessing throughout our preparations (reading each packet and preparing questions), throughout the interview, and throughout our deliberation. The MFC strives to be generative, blessing you into becoming more fully the minister you are and the minister the world needs.

There are two types of ministerial development: the checklist and the transformation. The checklist is the boxes you need to tick, the information you need to take in. The transformation is what happens while you're marinating in the experiences, the relationships, the hurts (yours, your neighbour's, the world's), marinating in the healing, the spirit, the "we." I offer this because the panel sensed that some candidates were too much formed by a historical system, whether in seminary or elsewhere, that focused too much on checklists rather than transformation. When ticking boxes in your competencies, consider what shaped you and what will stay with you. If you are someone whose point of view is typically centred and needs to be decentred, that is a transformation, not a box to tick.

I didn't do a mock MFC panel. Instead, I recommend you bring up your red flags and your mistakes multiple times with various colleagues. Make it feel normal to talk about them openly, humbly, gracefully. Practice telling the truth about yourself and your formation process. Tell people why you feel called to ministry. I'll also suggest a couple of improv games: The first is called 60-30-15-5: Practice answering a question, taking as long as you'd like. Then answer it again in only 60 seconds. Then in only 30 seconds, then 15 seconds, then 5 seconds. It's good practice for getting to the essence of what you want to say. The other improv game is called Many Voices (that's an improvised name). Practice answering a question in a variety of voices: prophetic voice, pastoral voice, therapy voice,bff voice, doom-scrolling voice. Get yourself out of interview mode and into ministry mode, with its many ways of being (perhaps you've already integrated them all into one voice).

It's a challenge to show up as a minister to the MFC when you don't know what they need. If you're the 5th interview, you don't know if they've just heard 4 sermons on the topic you're about to preach (suggestion: preach on something that makes your ministry come alive, not on what's trendy). Their hearts might need tending to, because of something that happened in the larger world, but they've also probably tended to their hearts in preparation for each interview. So read the room. More than needing to be ministered to right there, they might be asking themselves "Would I want this person at

my bedside at my death?" So be with them with the awareness that they are people who cherish life and who one day will die.

I believe the biggest challenge we face on this planet is how 8 billion people can co-exist and live interdependently. We don't have to all get along to get along, but still, how can 8 billion people get along? Compared to that daunting task, having an honest, heartfelt, pastoral, prophetic connection with your panel seems eminently doable. It by far will not be the most challenging conversation of your ministry. Whatever happens, may it be a blessing.