

First Year Minister Emissary Report
April 2021 Panels
Rev. Viola Abbitt

I had the honor to serve as a First Year Minister Emissary on one of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee's (MFC) panels that met in April 2021. Being a First Year Minister Emissary gave me incredible insight into the work that each panel does individually, and the work the committee does collectively as they prepare to meet with candidates.

As a Black person, my path to the MFC was filled with anxiety, and I think it is important that I speak to that. Because of life circumstances, I took a long time to finish seminary. Even before I began my studies in 2011, I heard stories about how difficult it was, especially for historically marginalized people, to make it through what was described as a gauntlet which ultimately culminated in an interview with a panel primarily occupied with gatekeeping and looking for a certain "type" of minister. That was not the MFC that I witnessed in my role. In addition to being a part of the candidate interviews, I was allowed to participate in some of the meetings that were available to the members of the MFC. This gave me a perspective that I would not have had otherwise. I found that the members of the MFC are a group of people who take very seriously the work that they do, who value Unitarian Universalism, who want to help nurture those who have chosen a path to ministry, and who are doing what is necessary to dismantle white supremacist culture within its structure, and they do all of that with care and love. I am awed at the amount of work and dedication involved, and I have profound respect for what they do in a way that I never did before. The UUA staff and members of the MFC work together to do all that they can to adequately prepare before meeting with each and every candidate that they speak with. Truly, we are in good hands.

Other than that, there is all kinds of advice that I could offer to people preparing to come before the MFC. Recommendations to do the reading, to know what is currently relevant in the denomination, and to be as prepared as you can be already come from many different sources. That is all true, and there is no news there. The most important thing that I can add is to be yourself. The wonderful thing about Unitarian Universalism is that we are on different paths, we have different interests and our individual calls to ministry are born out of different things. Be clear about it, own it, and show them the minister that you already are.