

April 24, 2015

Dear UU Leaders:

I am writing to share some important news regarding the Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy (RSCC's) of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee.

One of the primary ends of our Association is to nurture the health and welfare of our ministry. We have been evaluating the processes by which we do so and are shifting resources towards creating "In Care" communities of learning and support for ministers in formation that involve congregations, UUMA chapters and UUA staff in the discernment process, mentoring, and practical training of seminarians. I'm excited about our progress in building an In Care program in five regions that we plan to expand further (see [In Care](#) for more information).

On April 23rd, the UUA Board Of Trustees approved the FY16 budget. Funding for the RSCC's meetings has been eliminated, ending the regional subcommittee structure. Current aspirants for ministry are no longer required to make an appointment with an RSCC. Anticipating this change, the Ministerial Fellowship Committee has already voted that candidacy status will be granted to aspirants who fulfill the existing criteria, with the addition of submitting a field education evaluation or a Clinical Pastoral Education evaluation to become a candidate.

As we weigh the best possible use of resources, we are excited about the potential for investing more in In Care structures in the future. Some of the funds that supported the RSCC meetings will be allocated next year to working on regional In Care structures. The Ministerial Fellowship Committee itself will continue to be fully funded into the foreseeable future.

The RSCC's were created in 1999 with an initial budget of \$140,000, which was reduced to \$120,000 in the second year. Over the prior decade (1989-1999) 32 candidates had been denied credentials by the MFC (receiving a Category 5). The RSCC's were designed to provide what is called "In Care" support, and act as a mechanism for early feedback to prevent students from becoming indebted and then failing so late in their formation process.

The "In Care" aspect of the RSCC's was never developed, although the evaluative function was and it did in fact reduce the number of candidates receiving "5"s from the MFC to just 4 during the last fifteen years. Unfortunately, a large number of aspirants did not use the RSCC's for early feedback, choosing instead to put their appointments off until late in the process, thwarting the intention of offering early feedback. Additionally, none of the 26 individuals stopped by the RSCC's from gaining candidacy status dropped out of seminary, thus they continued to accrue debt.



In 2010 in an extremely tough budget year, the budget for the RSCC's was reduced total of \$42K, and administrative staffing to support the RSCC's was largely eliminated. This meant reducing the RSCC's from six regional committees to two committees that met twice a year on each coast.

Additionally, there was no room in the budget for continuing education or for bringing together the RSCC members with the MFC to align culture and practice as it evolved, leading to concerns expressed by aspirants about bias.

A recent evaluation of the RSCC process revealed that every group who was contacted wants greater "In Care" support. They feel that the UUA, through the MFC, puts up a series of expensive "hoops" rather than expressing care and support. This has created tension between our ministry and the UUA that persists into the careers of our ministers.

Every change brings loss. First, we have had amazing, thoughtful volunteers on our RSCC's put heart and soul into the process. Additionally, MFC members are concerned about the loss of a valuable formational evaluation, and many students have expressed appreciation for the feedback that they received from the RSCC's. There are impacts for the UUMA as well, which has aligned its membership requirements with the "candidate" requirements of the MFC.

These days we need to weigh our resources and efforts carefully and invest where we think we can make the greatest difference. Letting go of any established program is hard, but it also has a silver lining. In this case it is freeing up staff time, creating new collaborations, and allowing us to invest in a vital future for ministry.

In Faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Lammert". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "In Faith,".

The Rev. Sarah Lammert
Director of Ministries and Faith Development
Executive Secretary, Ministerial Fellowship Committee