

October 6, 2010

Dear UU Ministerial Candidates,

It has been a little over a week since I served as the candidate liaison for the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, and I am still reflecting on what an amazing experience it was! I found the MFC panel members to be kind, courageous, extremely thorough and completely dedicated to this process and our movement. I came away from my week in Boston with even more UU pride (if that's possible!). I also found myself even more deeply committed to do what I can to ensure that our liberal faith tradition continues to flourish.

I will admit that my own MFC interview was one of the most nerve-racking experiences of my adult life! For me, it represented the culmination of so many things – a carefully considered decision to live into a more authentic vocation, years of intensive study, and a number of personal sacrifices. It was hard to relax then, but I can see after sitting with the MFC this past September that I was worrying *way* too much about minute details – and that I was more prepared than I realized.

What should you do to prepare for your own interview? Here are four suggestions based on my liaison experience:

- 1. Take the RSCC recommendations seriously.** It was my observation that the MFC *highly* values the feedback and suggestions the RSCC outlines in their letters to new candidates. If a candidate's letter contained several recommendations for improvements, the MFC panel asked about each one specifically the day of the interview. So, it seems wise to revisit your RSCC letter well ahead of your MFC interview to ensure that you have either followed through on each recommendation – or can provide a very good explanation for why you didn't.
- 2. Finish all the required readings.** The MFC will check the required reading list you submitted to make sure that you have completed it. I noticed that panel members developed general questions based on the contents of these books . . . and asked them! I also learned that if you are hoping to score a Category 1 in your interview, finishing the readings is a **must**. If a candidate did not complete the readings, s/he was informed at the start of the interview that the highest ranking s/he could expect to receive was a Category 2 (finishing the readings would then become a contingency for receiving preliminary fellowship).
- 3. Take a balanced approach to your preparation.** Each member of my MFC panel member brought a copy of the candidate's packet to the interview, along with reading notes and questions which were discussed as a group prior to each interview. I observed that the MFC took a well-rounded approach to each candidate's interview, asking a range of personal, theological and competency area questions. Questions covered a broad range of topics, but **every** question

referred to the content, competencies or references found in the packet. So, the advice from other candidate liaisons to “know your packet” strikes me as right on target.

- 4. Integrate versus memorize.** While you will likely get some “dates, people and events”-type questions, I discovered that the MFC consistently looked for integration of each candidate’s experiences and knowledge rather than memorization of material. When a candidate got a factual question wrong, I noticed that the MFC interviewer frequently gave that person an opportunity to address a different question related to the same topic. I’m not suggesting that **not** knowing historical facts and milestones is okay! However, it seems that the MFC understands that candidates are human (and nervous), and therefore they aren’t expecting perfect answers. What they did seem to be looking for was a new minister who had fully integrated her or his UU identity – which includes displaying a deep and wide understanding of our rich tradition, as well as intimate knowledge of one’s own personal strengths and weaknesses.

Ultimately, it seems as if the MFC wanted what I wanted for myself during the interview – *the opportunity to experience an authentic UU minister and human being*. The panel listened carefully to the sermons for clarity in message and theology. They spent considerable time preparing for the interviews, including participating in continuing education workshops, to make sure that the questions asked were relevant to the candidate and to the needs of our ministry. Overall, I found the process filled with love and integrity as the MFC interviewed and deliberated each candidate with compassion and courage.

I wish you the very best as you prepare for this important milestone. Getting to the MFC has likely been a challenging road for you (as it was for me) . . . but know that they are rooting for you in our journey together of ministry and faith.

Terry A. Davis