

MFC Winter 2020 Business Meeting Minutes

Sunday, December 6 Sunday 12:30-6PM, EDT

Present: (Zoom)

Rebekah Savage, Co-Chair; Jackie Clement, Co-Chair; Don Brunnuell; Nick Allen; Shirley Lange; Karen LoBracco; Michael Lyde; Shawn Newton; Amanda Poppei; Joetta Prost; Kären Rasmussen; Maddie Sifantus; Michael Tino; Greg Ward; UUA Staff - Sarah Lammert, Marta Valentín, Jonipher Kwong, Marion Bell

OPEN MEETING

UPDATES FROM STAFF:

Sarah Lammer, Co-Director of MFC

- We are starting to see an increase in requests for emergency assistance from the Living Tradition Fund. I expect this trend to continue given the economic stresses of the pandemic.
- Transitions reports the smallest number of congregations in search (25) in recent memory (normally there are 40-50 congregations in search). This may represent holding back on change during the pandemic, or in some cases waiting a year to replace an outgoing minister. We may wish to invite the Rev. Keith Kron and the Rev. Patrice Curtis from the Transitions office to meet with the MFC in March to discuss what trends they are seeing.
- In UUA news, the leadership structure was recently reorganized from one “Leadership Council” to three more focused senior leader bodies:

1. Staff Group Managers: This group consists of everyone who reports to our President, Executive VP, or CFO/Treasurer, and the focus is staff HR decisions/support and budget planning.
2. Commission on Institutional Change (COIC)/Mission Alignment Team: This group is focused on the work outlined for the UUA as a staff in the COIC report; helping the UUA be a learning community; align and resource COIC related work; and will produce a 5- year plan to be presented to the General Assembly in 2021.
3. Senior Leader Advisory Team: This team includes “those with the most responsibility in the UUA” (including Dr. Janice Marie Johnson and myself) and advises the President on strategic initiatives such as capital campaigns, board relations and communications.

Jonipher Kwong, Ministerial Credentialing Director

- We have fewer internship opportunities for next year as I was hoping. To date, we only have 10 listings on the internship clearinghouse site.
- We also received four internship salary grant applications (last year we had about a dozen). I extended the deadline to December 10th to give people an opportunity to fill them out and turn them in.
- we were able to film the orientation for our First-Year Minister Emissaries.
- As of November 24, we have 165 aspirants and 166 candidates, for a total of 331 in formation. Out of that, 57 identify as Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC), or roughly 16%.

Marta Valentin, Professional Development Director

- Update to First Year Minister’s seminar – now online.
- Update on conversation with Michael Tino and SWG regarding upcoming revision to renewal process.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

i. Weds Apr 7 (Exec) - Sun Apr 11, 2021 (Transforming Hearts Training for Thursday Morning Meeting. Advanced work will need to be scheduled)

ii. Weds Sep 22 (Exec) - Sun Sep 26, 2021

New meetings scheduled:

Winter 2021

Wednesday, Dec 1 (Exec) – Sunday, Dec 5

Spring 2022

Wednesday, Mar 23 (Exec) – Sunday, Mar 27

MFC 2021 Summer retreat dates- Friday, July 23 - Sunday, July 25 (Sexual Health, UUMA guidelines work)

PROCESS WORKING GROUP

- Sarah to communicate to the UUA Nominating Committee the significant need for more BIPOC MFC members, and for a hope that all new members would come with some personal background/work around anti-racism.
- Nick and Sarah to update the list of educational training that the MFC has participated in.
- Rebekah to look at the MFC reading list, with special attention to the "familiarity with content" sections which change frequently.
- Sarah to schedule the pre- and post-work required by the Transforming Hearts Collective for our spring training.
- Rebekah to contact Kate Walker and Sunshine Wolfe about offering a training on sexual boundaries, and Melissa Carville-Ziemer about supporting a conversation getting the MFC up to speed on the revised UUMA guidelines - both trainings/conversations likely to happen as part of a summer retreat, online.

- Nick to draft some new language for the reading list describing what "familiarity with content" means, asking candidates to engage with particularly the anti-racism and anti-oppression work in community, and clarifying that a list asking for familiarity with content means everything on that list unless noted otherwise.
- Amanda to request the MFC orientation packet from Marion, and to look at it with an eye toward any new materials needed or any revisions needed, especially around shared language on white supremacy culture or other topics of interest to the COIC report.

SETTLEMENT WORKING GROUP

The Settlement Working Group (SWG), having no waiver requests (very rare) turned significant attention to a longstanding goal of evolutionary reform. SWG wishes to ask the question, 'what's the real goal of our renewal process and what do we want our minister's in preliminary fellowship to be getting from it.'

This is not new. Alicia Forde began asking some of the same key questions back in 2016. Greg and Alicia engaged in considering the question and making some minor reforms within the current framework. Don picked up this thread and the conversations deepened. Lack of available time and the myriad of other MFC responsibilities were obstacles to more substantive systemic change.

The COIC report, Marta Valentin's poignant and clarifying questions and Michael Tino's exec portfolio responsibilities have ushered past interests into a new exploration.

Specifically, our efforts are interested in re-emphasizing our work away from a 'gate-keeping' evaluative body to a body that aims to work in networked partnership with the myriad of other sources of experience and learning (parish boards, CoMs, Mentors, Professional Development Office, partners / peers in community and entrepreneurial ministry contexts).

We have identified some key changes we're interested in exploring including some of the basic questions around renewals. Rather than primarily evaluating competency within each of 7 areas, the idea is to ask partners to share

1. How have you witnessed ministerial growth in this area?
2. Where might ministerial growth continue?
3. In what ways have you (as a partner) contributed to the minister's growth?

The hope is for

- Growing Competence
- Development of professional support network
 - prompt, encourage and ensure ongoing dialogue between minister and partners
 - Avoid truncation or factions in communication
 - Explore ways of educating boards, CoMs, Mentors and Ministers regarding this new collaborative partnership in a minister's development
- Development of personal support network
 - Peers
 - Move away from 'hurdles' toward completion of preliminary fellowship to 'life-long-learning.'
- Preparation for Ministerial "Innovation"

TIMELINE

- Draft of possible components to recommendation (complete)
- Michael T., Michael L., Don B. bring this to a draft recommendation by Feb. 1.
- Send draft to key stakeholders for review
 - Staff (Marta and Marion) and PWR

- Some in Preliminary Fellowship (emissaries)
 - Society of Community Ministries or chapter of the UUMA for Community Ministries
 - Some Innovative or Entrepreneurial Ministers
 - Congregational Life Staff and Regional Staff (recommending some Congregational Boards and CoM's who could respond)
 - BIPOC Group
 - GLBTQI Group
- Have a recommendation for the Exec by March 15
 - Continue to work toward a new model for review by Fall 2021
 - Implementation by Fall 2022

Transformation Shepherd Updates - Michael T

Wider Path Task Force update

Widening the Circle next priorities update

Formal Proposal for MFC Category Reform

Introduction

We propose to replace the central question of the MFC interview.

Since the MFC came into its modern form in the 1920s, our interviews have asked: *Is this candidate competent for ministry?* We are no longer certain this is the right question to center in our interviews. It is a question steeped in a history of racial bias, gender exclusion, and elite protection. In practice, we affirm that it is impossible to separate competence from normative biases and culturally narrow ideals of ministry, especially in a short interaction. So long as the

interview primarily measures competence, oppressive practices in assessing it will remain, no matter how we revise our guidelines for basic competence or “name” our biases in interviews.

We instead propose the following questions be central to the MFC’s decision regarding a candidate’s entry into ministerial fellowship:

- Has the candidate embodied a call to the Unitarian Universalist ministry, including their identity as a Unitarian Universalist, during their formation?
- Does the candidate have the support they need to carry out their call?
- Will the candidate assume their ministry in accountable covenant with the Association and other professional ministers?
- Does the candidate show commitment to lifespan learning and growth in ministry?

We propose to replace the category system with a simpler decision, coupled with deeper feedback.

Our category system, which ranks candidates 1-5, was created in the 1980s to replace a pass/fail approach to entering fellowship. Its principle was to demand greater discernment and preparation from candidates not yet competent for ministry, but showing promise.

Categories are perceived by candidates as ordinal rankings, and it is difficult to convey the fullness of our feedback through a single number. For the panel, categories are fuzzy (“1 or 3?”). For candidates, categories are perilous. Meeting the requirements of Categories 2, 3, or 4 requires candidates to have financial resources to spare significant periods of time before being allowed to apply for settled ministries, as well as the means to travel to see the committee again (when one day we resume in-person meetings). Opportunities for learning are instead dominated by a high-stakes classification exercise.

We imagine MFC decisions that bring the fullness of our interview into the candidate’s formation, and decisions that create a less rigid, perilous moment at the end of candidacy. We are proposing that the numbered categories be replaced with three possible decisions, the first two of which could come with specific required steps before being admitted to the next stage of ministerial fellowship. This allows the Committee to uphold expectations of candidates without always imposing professional penalties and puts greater weight on preliminary fellowship as a time to grow in ministry.

- **Affirmed in Fellowship: Qualified for Unitarian Universalist ministry.**

A candidate affirmed in fellowship is given counsel always. When needed, candidates are given professional development requirements that must be completed during preliminary fellowship, which would be reported as part of the renewal process. Preliminary fellowship renewal paperwork will require updates on specifically addressing these requirements.

- **Continued in Candidacy: Qualified for Unitarian Universalist ministry with contingencies that must be satisfied before entering preliminary fellowship.**

A candidate continued in candidacy is given specific contingencies to satisfy before entering preliminary fellowship. These contingencies must be ones that the committee feels cannot be adequately addressed in preliminary fellowship or that the committee feels must be addressed to avoid doing harm to people in future ministry settings. Contingencies for any candidate could include a return visit to the committee if the committee felt strongly that they needed to witness evidence of the candidate having met the contingency.

- **Discontinued from Candidacy: The Committee has serious doubt about the individual's suitability for Unitarian Universalist ministry, based at least in part on evaluations and feedback presented in the candidate's packet.**

A candidate discontinued from candidacy is not immediately eligible to return for an interview. Candidates would be advised about what concerns would need to be addressed before a return is possible. The candidate would be able to apply to the MFC Executive Committee for a return and would be expected to have shown significant progress towards meeting the concerns of the committee before a return visit is approved.

Rule Change Requested of the UUA Board:

Once approved by the Board, the Policy Changes will need to be approved by the MFC.

Motion: (Michael) to approve the changes to the MFC Rules and Policies as noted below. Jackie 2nd. Approved/Unanimous.

We ask the UUA Board to approve the following changes to Rule 9:

9. Interview Procedure

No applicant shall receive Ministerial Fellowship without being interviewed ~~at least once~~ by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee.

Following the interview the candidate will be informed by the Committee of its decision. Candidates ~~receiving either a Category I or a Category II for Preliminary Fellowship~~ **affirmed in fellowship with professional development requirements** shall be required to satisfy all contingencies **requirements before being granted full fellowship.** ~~within three years of the Committee's decision. Failure to do so will result in nullifying the original decision.~~

A. Decision Categories

Affirmed in Fellowship: Qualified for Unitarian Universalist ministry.

Continued in Candidacy: Qualified for Unitarian Universalist ministry with contingencies that must be satisfied before entering preliminary fellowship. The Committee may, in some cases, require a return interview.

Discontinued from Candidacy: The Committee has considerable doubt about the individual's suitability for Unitarian Universalist ministry, based at least in part on evaluations and feedback presented in the candidate's packet.

~~Category I~~

~~Qualified for Unitarian Universalist ministry with no contingencies other than satisfactory completion of degree, internship, and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE).~~

~~Category II~~

~~Qualified for Unitarian Universalist ministry provided specific contingencies are met satisfactorily.~~

~~Category III~~

~~Encouraging progress for Unitarian Universalist ministry, but with issues to be addressed, (i.e., academic, personal, institutional understanding, etc.) so that the MFC requires a return visit. If specific work has been outlined, it must be completed before a return visit.~~

~~Category IV~~

~~Considerable doubt as to whether the candidate meets the general qualifications for Unitarian Universalist ministry.~~

~~Category V~~

~~The MFC sees no potential for the candidate in Unitarian Universalist ministry, and discourages the candidate from further preparation.~~

B. Return Interviews

Applications to appear before the Committee from candidates who have **been discontinued from candidacy** ~~previously received a Category IV or V~~ shall be reviewed and approved by the Executive Committee at its discretion.

Implementation Timeline:

These categories will go into effect for the Fall 2021 meeting or 9 months after the rule change is approved by the UUA Board, whichever is later.

Policy Changes for MFC to Pass:

We propose the following changes to MFC policies:

7. Scheduling of Interviews

B. Return Interviews

~~Candidates who received a Category III may meet with the Committee again a year (or later) after the initial interview.~~ Candidates who received a ~~Category IV or V~~ decision by the MFC **have been discontinued from candidacy by the MFC** must receive MFC Executive Committee approval before scheduling a return interview.

No changes to other sections of policy 7.

10. Length of Candidate Status and Removal of Candidate Files

Candidate Status is limited to seven years from the date that candidacy was granted. Any Candidate file which has been inactive for seven years may be destroyed by the Ministerial Credentialing Office.

~~A Candidate who receives a Category IV will be removed from Candidate Status after four years following the date of their MFC interview.~~

~~A Candidate who receives a Category V will be removed from candidate status.~~

No changes to other sections of policy 10.

13. Progress towards Full Fellowship and Ministry Eligible for Renewal

Full Fellowship will be awarded when three successful renewals of Preliminary Fellowship are completed **and all professional development requirements given at the time of the minister's interview with the MFC have been satisfied.**

No changes to other sections of policy 13.