

Report of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee

June 2006

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee is one of the standing committees of the Board of Trustees, established by the bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The fourteen members include twelve persons appointed by the UUA Board of Trustees, including two members who are themselves Trustees, and two persons appointed by the UU Ministers Association. Eight members are clergy and six are lay members. Two recently fellowshipped ministers are invited to attend the meetings as liaisons to candidates; their reports can be found on the web site, www.uua.org/programs/ministry/mfc.

Our primary charge is the jurisdiction of ministerial fellowship, beginning with the credentialing of candidates for Unitarian Universalist ministry. The basic requirements for fellowship, which are established by the MFC, include an undergraduate degree and a Master of Divinity degree or their equivalent, a career assessment program, a unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, an approved internship, sponsorship by a UU congregation, and an interview with the MFC. Most candidates will also have interviewed with a Regional Sub-committee on Candidacy (RSCC); after December 31st, 2006 all aspirants must first be granted candidacy status by an RSCC before an interview with the Committee can be scheduled.

The Committee also grants renewals toward final fellowship, considers complaints and other possible disciplinary matters, and is engaged in constant review of its own processes and procedures. An up-to-date version of the rules and policies can be found at www.uua.org/programs/ministry/mfc. Portions of each business meeting were open to observers, with the agenda and times posted on the web site in advance.

The business of the Committee this past year has focused in several areas. First of all we have been further refining what it means to no longer fellowship ministers in a category of ministry. Ministers now define their ministry by what area they are actually engaged working in (parish, religious education or community) and work towards recognition of specialty in that area of ministry by completing three renewals in one particular specialty. Ministers receive preliminary and final fellowship in UU ministry. Several policies have been created this year to “grandparent” in ministers currently with final fellowship in a category (the old system.) All ministers current in final fellowship in a category of ministry are now recognized as having a specialty in whatever their category of ministry is. We also removed any requirement to “track switch” or formally apply to the MFC to shift from one category of ministry to another. Ministers now are free to pursue whichever ministry they choose, but will not be recognized as having a specialty in that ministry until they have completed three renewals in that area of ministry. The Committee recognized that other changes in policies may need to be made to further accommodate this new system.

The Committee continued to affirm its commitment to promoting an anti-racist, anti-oppressive ministry and will be devoting time at each of our meetings to addressing this work.

The MFC is concerned about the number of recent complaint cases that have come before us recently regarding concern over ministers' behavior. The MFC Executive Committee has met with a number of these ministers and has referred others for on-going review and work. The Committee held one formal hearing to remove a minister from fellowship and met with several others to review with them their conduct.

Sixty-four candidates were interviewed in the past year, at three different sites (Boston, Berkeley, and Chicago). Twenty-nine were from one of the two Unitarian Universalist seminaries (Meadville/Lombard Theological School or Starr King School for the Ministry). Of those, 54 were granted preliminary fellowship with or without minor contingencies, 5 were seen as making promising progress towards ministry, but we would like to see them again, and 5 were discouraged from continuing their pursuit of ministry. The number of women exceeded male candidates (46 compared with 18). During the course of the year, forty-eight ministers completed their first renewals; fifty-eight completed second renewals; and forty-six were granted Final Fellowship.

The Committee experienced quite a bit of transition this year bidding a fond farewell to our illustrious chair who served the Committee so well these past 6 years, Phyllis Daniel, and UUMA representatives Rev. Stephen Pappa and Rev. Dr. Ken Reeves. Our two Board liaisons, Rev. Wayne Arnason and Ms. Sue Stuke also left us, and we welcomed new board liaisons, Rev. Linda Olson Peebles and Ms. Jacquelyn Shanti. We respectfully roasted our Executive Secretary, Rev. David Hubner, as he spent his last meeting with us this past March. And we welcomed new members, Rev. Dr. Patrick O'Neill and Rev. Emily Gage (UUMA liaisons) and Ms. Justice Waidner. Finally, our UUA staff MFC Assistant, Griff Bell left us in October and we are still in the process of hiring a new staff assistant.

Ongoing Committee members include Rev. Dr. Mark Belletini (Vice Chair); Ms. Abbey Tennis (Executive Committee); Dr. P.D. Wadler (Executive Committee); Rev. Dr. James Zacharias (convenor of the Settlement Working Group); the Rev. Dr. Carolyn Owen-Towle; Dr. James Brown; Rev. Geoff Rimositis (convenor of the Candidacy Working Group); and Ms. Betty Bobo Seiden. Rev. David Hubner serves as Executive Secretary and we are ably supported by staff members the Rev. Dr. Michelle Bentley, the Rev. David Pettee, and Christine May.

Respectfully submitted

Rev. Jory Agate