

## **Ministerial Fellowship Committee Annual Report to the General Assembly** Wayne Arnason, Chair May 2008

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) is a by-law defined committee of the UUA Board of Trustees charged with broad responsibilities for credentialing Unitarian Universalist ministers for service in our association of congregations and for insuring the ethical integrity of our credentialed ministry. The committee meets three times each year to interview candidates for preliminary fellowship, to review renewals of preliminary fellowship, to grant final fellowship, and to consider circumstances and charges which could lead to a change in the fellowship status of a minister. 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 fellowshiped 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](http://www.uua.org/programs/ministry/mfc).

This has been a year of major changes among the members of Ministerial Fellowship Committee. Despite these changes, continuity of mission, vision, and process has been sustained. After two years of distinguished service, our Chair Rev. Jory Agate accepted appointment to the position of Director of Ministerial Development in the UUA's Ministerial and Professional Leadership Working Group. Outgoing chair Agate's transition to a staff role with the committee has proceeded well and insured valuable continuity. We were blessed by the leadership of former Chair Phyllis Daniel as our Interim Chair for our fall and winter 07 meetings. We have been deeply grateful for her experience and wisdom in this role during a critical time. Rev. Wayne Arnason became Chair on January 1, 2008.

In addition to working under three different chairs in the twelve months since the last annual report, the committee's membership has changed significantly. Six long-serving members of the committee have completed their terms or chosen to resign before their terms ended. We bid farewell to UUMA appointee Rev. Patrick O'Neill in September, and in December to three eight-year members: Rev. Marc Belletini, (Vice Chair); Jim Brown, and Betty Bobo Seiden. In the spring Rev. James Zacharias and Rev. Geoff Rimositis tendered their resignations to pursue other areas of service. Our MFC has been blessed by their service.

During the year five new members were appointed – three clergy and two lay members. Two more appointments are pending at this writing. The new clergy members are Wayne Arnason, Cleveland OH (Chair); Howard Dana, Harrisburg PA (UUMA appointee); and Cynthia Kane, San Diego CA. The new lay members are Karen Eng, Oakland CA; and Tony Stringer, Atlanta, GA. Seven new members out of fourteen total within one twelve-month period is a lot!

In the midst of all this transition, the culture of the committee remains one of common dedication to excellence in ministry. The MFC is therefore looking forward to being part

of the ongoing conversation in our association about encouraging excellence in our professional leadership.

The MFC's process respects precedent and the wisdom of guiding policy, but does not hesitate to innovate when change is warranted. A good example of such innovation is the recent battery of rules changes approved in April 2008 to the UUA Board of Trustees.

Among these changes are streamlined procedures for disciplinary procedures, that recognize that the MFC is not a judicial body, but a credentialing body. The MFC can both award and can suspend or remove the privilege of fellowship as a Unitarian Universalist minister recognized by our association of congregations. Both functions require the same kind of discernment. We are therefore broadening our options for reviewing a person's fellowship standing, to include not only alleged ethical violations, but also questions of competence, with a new option available to us in the form of requiring a period of probation. Another important change is removing the requirement for congregational affiliation for community ministers in final fellowship. This is a change that recognizes that the MFC sees the privileges of final fellowship applying equally to all ministers. Some of the MFC's policy changes required some accompanying changes in wording in the UUA bylaws, and you will find these changes before you at this General Assembly.

Other accomplishments this year included updating and revising the MFC's required reading list, which gives candidates more choices and recognizes the availability to them of web-based readings and sources.

The Committee continued to affirm its commitment to promoting an anti-racist, anti-oppressive ministry. We devote time at each of our meetings and our orientations for new members to addressing this work. Our business this year has included a meeting with members of the Board of Review. The MFC Chair and staff also attended a Consultation on Professional Ministry to and with Youth, and brought our learnings and commitments back to the full committee.

The MFC Executive Committee met with a number of ministers regarding their professional behavior. One minister resigned from fellowship with a charge of conduct unbecoming a minister pending. Several other ministers are continuing to be monitored and are in conversation with the MFC with varying requirements regarding their conduct.

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

renewals; forty-five completed second renewals; and forty-one were granted Final Fellowship.

In addition, the Committee moved nine ministers in Preliminary Fellowship from Full Fellowship to Inactive Fellowship. These ministers are not currently working in ministry and not engaged in the process of renewal towards Final Fellowship. They may be moved back into Full Fellowship on petition to the Committee.

I was honored to be asked to chair the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and in concluding this annual report I want to pledge to you my best efforts as we go forward together.