

## **Ministerial Fellowship Committee Annual Report to the General Assembly**

Wayne Arnason, Chair May 5, 2011

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 membership of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee has been under review by the Board of Trustees this year and the 2011 General Assembly has proposed by-law changes that would give the UU Ministers Association (UUMA) a larger proportion of appointees and give the MFC more flexibility in matching the members of the committee with the number of candidates desiring to see the committee. Currently, the MFC has fourteen members, with twelve persons appointed by the UUA Board of Trustees, including two members who are themselves Trustees. Currently two persons are appointed by the UU Ministers Association. Eight members are clergy and six are lay members. The changes proposed at the 2011 General Assembly anticipate changes in the size of the Board of Trustees. They would remove the requirement that two members of the MFC be members of the Board of Trustees, and give those two appointments to the UUMA. Another proposed change would not define the current size of the MFC as a limit, but as a bottom threshold, allowing for members to be brought on for meetings when a third panel was needed for interviews with candidates.

Two recently fellowshipped ministers are always invited to attend the meetings as liaisons to candidates. These liaisons sit in on panels and participate fully without voting. They also participate in the business sessions, both confidential and non-confidential. The non-confidential business sessions are always open to the public as per UUA policy. People who wish to read more about the internal workings of the MFC might find the liaisons' reports interesting. They can be found on the UUA's web site, at [www.uua.org/programs/ministry/mfc](http://www.uua.org/programs/ministry/mfc), under the column on the left of the screen, by clicking on "Liaisons to Candidates".

Our membership has remained stable this year, which is an occasional blessing we enjoy. If the by-law changes at GA 2011 pass, we will lose our two UUA Trustee members: Rev. Jose Ballester and David Friedman. We are also losing Cary McDonald because he has accepted an appointment to the UUA staff. By the time January 2012 rolls around, these changes and the normal term limits will mean that our committee of fourteen will have five new members serving.

Sarah Lammert joined the MFC this year as our Executive Secretary in her capacity as Director of Ministries and Faith Development at the UUA. The members of the committee have enjoyed working with her and very much appreciate her leadership and support. We are blessed with extraordinary staff support befitting the significance of the work we do. Rev. Jory Agate and Rev. David Pettee meet with our panels and follow up on our decisions as part of their staff roles. Our MFC Assistant, Marion Bell, handles our administrative needs with efficiency and grace. Chris May is our longest serving staff supporter. Her work with the candidates as they prepare their packets for our

consideration is a significant and unsung ministry within our Association and the candidates gratitude to Chris is evident when they meet her during our interviews.

This report routinely includes our statistics for the year:

62 candidates were interviewed in the past year, at two different sites (Boston, and Chicago). Of those, 47 were granted preliminary fellowship with or without minor contingencies, 11 were seen as making promising progress towards ministry, but we would like to see them again, and 4 were discouraged from continuing their pursuit of ministry. Of all the candidates we saw this year 25 were from one of the two Unitarian Universalist "identity seminaries" (Meadville/Lombard Theological School or Starr King School for the Ministry). The number of women exceeded male candidates (38 compared with 24) and none identified as transgender or genderqueer. During the course of the year, 43 ministers completed their first renewals; 56 completed second renewals; and 38 were granted Final Fellowship.

In addition, the Committee moved 10 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.

The review and evaluation of our ministry, and of ministerial credentialing as a part of this, has been ongoing during 2010-11. This was an evaluation we requested and welcomed since we did not see our committee having the time, resources, and objectivity to undertake it ourselves. The UUA Board heard a preliminary and personal report from the project manager for their evaluation, Tamara Payne-Alex in April 2011. During the same month, the Administration released its own Strategic Review of Professional Ministry. On-line conversation about these presentations has been lively and creative and diverse in the opinions about where we go next. The MFC will have its own conversations about options being discussed and will be a willing participant when stakeholders are gathered for input or for decisions.

In response to the volume of candidates for the ministry requesting our appointments, we had a discussion with the Board this year about whether we should change over to a three panel system. Currently the formal membership of the MFC allows for only two panels of seven members each to conduct interviews with candidates concurrently. We will experiment with three panels twice during the year ahead, if the by-law amendments at the 2011 general Assembly giving us greater flexibility in our membership are passed.

In order to conserve the Association's resources, we have scheduled our next four 2011-12 meetings in Boston where we can be lodged in Association-owned facilities. The changing pattern of how people attend seminary and how they make their decisions about an MFC interview means that meeting geographically closer to UU seminaries no longer presents significant financial advantages to all but a small number of candidates.

Despite the fact that candidate interviews and decisions about policies affecting candidates take up 80% of our four day meeting, we have found ways to do our administrative business that allow the MFC to undertake continuing education sessions at least twice a year. This year, we brought in an educator from the Religious Institute: Faithful Voices on Sexuality and Religion, to help us with assessment strategies for the

new competency on sexual health that all our candidates will now need to demonstrate. We also engaged in a full-day training exploring our strengths and weaknesses with issues of anti-racism, anti-oppression and multiculturalism, and had a two-hour training on transgender and genderqueer identities to help us better understand the culture and experience of the candidates that come to us with these identities .

The MFC Executive Committee had to deal with complaints against several ministers regarding their professional behavior and fellowship status. Decisions affecting a ministers' fellowship status are reported in the UU World after they are made. Several ministers are continuing to be monitored and are in conversation with the MFC with varying requirements regarding their conduct.

I am honored to serve as chair of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. I think I speak for all our members in saying that we find it to be deeply meaningful work on behalf of our congregations. We all continue to pledge our best efforts to you in the days ahead.