

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

Rev. Wayne Arnason, Chair - April 25, 2012

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. Last year the 2011 General Assembly approved by-law changes that gave the UU Ministers Association (UUMA) a larger proportion of appointees and gave the MFC more flexibility in matching the members of the committee with the number of candidates desiring to see the committee. The changes approved recognized the impending changes in the size of the Board of Trustees. They removed the requirement that two members of the MFC be members of the Board of Trustees, and gave those two appointments to the UUMA. The other change that was made removed any definition of the current size of the MFC (14 members) as a limit, but rather as a bottom threshold, allowing for members to be brought on for meetings when a third panel was needed for interviews with candidates.

As a result of these changes, the MFC scheduled two of its three meetings in the past year with an extra interview panel. This allowed us to interview twenty more candidates during the past year than in previous years. We will do this again at our September 2012 meeting to further address the demand for interviews. Our goal is to have most candidates scheduled for appointments no more than a year out from their first request.

Although these changes in our membership and panel process have resulted in many variations in the membership of the MFC at each of the meetings this year, a core group of about eight experienced members has always been present for each meeting, and the staff presence in support of both panels and business processes has been consistent. The members who are brought in as substitutes for regular appointees who must miss a meeting, and the extra members brought in to fill out a third panel, are often former members or staff of the MFC, or members of our Regional Sub-Committees. So they bring a wealth of experience to the table. We have been pleasantly surprised at how seamless this year of experimentation with a third panel has gone, and feel comfortable continuing in this mode as needed into the future.

We have greatly appreciated the communication and cooperation of the UUA Board's Committee on Committees and the UUMA's Board in recruiting splendid people and making the various appointments they were responsible for in a timely way.

Two recently fellowshiped ministers are always invited to attend the meetings as liaisons to candidates, and we were able to add a third liaison when we had three panels. 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 appointed membership has changed considerably this year after two years of relative stability. Our two UUA Trustee members: Rev. Jose Ballester and David Friedman were retired due to the by-law changes. Their seats were taken by two UUMA appointees: Rev. Karen Gustafson of Madison, WI and Rev. Gary Smith of Concord MA. We lost Cary McDonald due to his UUA staff appointment. His seat was taken by Mark Watanabe of Dorchester, MA. A long-serving UUMA appointee, Rev. Emily Gage, retired after six years of service, and the UUMA appointed Rev. Shana Lynngood of Victoria, British Columbia. P.D. Wadler reached his term limit after eight years of service. The UUA Board was required to find a psychologist to replace Mr. Wadler, and appointed Dr. Bill Kirkpatrick of Minneapolis MN. Rev. Cynthia Kane, who serves as a U.S. Navy Chaplain, found that new duties would make it more difficult for her to finish her current term, and the Board has appointed Rev. Jennifer Hamlin-Navias of Syracuse, NY to complete her term.

The members of the MFC continue to feel blessed by our excellent staff support. Our Executive Secretary, Rev. Sarah Lammert, has learned all our ropes and unties knots that many of us didn't know existed. Rev. David Pettee is now our longest-serving staff member and has assumed extra burdens due to the staffing cuts and changes in his areas of work. Rev. Jory Agate announced her plans to leave her position after this year's GA. We celebrate the new opportunities Jory is exploring but will miss her wisdom and knowledge among us. Jory served as the Chair of the MFC before being appointed Director of Ministerial Development, so her years of experience will be hard to replace. Our MFC Coordinator, Marion Bell is in her third year of service and knows our administrative needs inside out. We are grateful to have her with us. This year brought further administrative changes as Chris May, our longest serving staff supporter, retired in February. Chris has been the "voice" of the MFC for so many candidates as they prepare their packets for our consideration, and it is hard to lose her. Happily, an experienced staff member from within the Ministries and Faith Development staff group, Chris Spiegel, was brought into take over Chris's position, so the continuity and quality of work has been sustained.

This report routinely includes our statistics for the year:

78 candidates were interviewed in the past year in Boston only. Of those, 63 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 34 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 (47 compared with 29) and 2 identified as transgender or gender-queer. During the course of the year, 167 ministers completed renewals; and 54 were granted Final Fellowship.

In addition, the Committee moved 9 ministers in Preliminary Fellowship from Full Fellowship to Inactive Fellowship and 14 ministers were removed from 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 2011-12. 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. We have responded to the UUA Administration's Strategic Review of Professional Ministry by making changes in the role and composition of our Regional Subcommittees on Candidacy.

At our December 2011 meeting, the MFC decided to reconfigure the Regional Subcommittees from four to two, and to increase the number of meetings the two subcommittees have from one each year to two each year. This decision was budget neutral, but improves the culture and the quality of the evaluative and supportive work that these groups do for our aspirants towards ministry. This new configuration will begin with the fall 2012 meetings. We have appreciated working with the Board's Committee on Committees to create a pool of eligible candidates to serve on these RSCC's.

At the March 2012 meeting, the MFC passed a provisional change, which we will circulate among stakeholders and then take up again and vote up or down in late September 2012 before the two RSCC's meet in their new configuration for the first time. The significant change provisionally passed will remove the option the RSCC's currently have of being able to halt an aspirant's progress by denying candidacy. The fear that is associated with being stopped has unfortunately become such a barrier for aspirants that it has helped create a culture among our aspirants that they should wait until they are nearly graduated, before they are 'ready' to see an RSCC.

The actual proposed text that we passed by a 10-3 vote in March is in a single section of the MFC policies that list the requirements an aspirant must fulfill in order to make an appointment with the MFC. The text would now make no mention of denying candidacy and would say that an aspirant must have:

"Been interviewed and approved for Candidate Status by the RSCC. An RSCC may require additional interviews before candidacy is granted."

Note that in this initial vote the MFC has retained the RSCC's ability to require another interview or even more than one. The Committee felt that retaining this authority would encourage people to see the RSCC sooner, thereby assuring that their personal timelines for formation, credentialing, and settlement could include the possibility of more than one interview, while at the same time knowing that being denied candidacy is off the table.

There are still a few people on the MFC who have worked on this proposal who felt that while the additional interview(s) may be required, that the Candidacy status should be granted automatically after the first interview has been completed. The rationale for their point of view is that we want aspirants to get into Candidacy status sooner to take advantage of relationships with UUMA members and the UUMA code. The view that prevailed in our vote was that Candidacy should only happen when an RSCC grants it, and that for most aspirants this would happen after one interview anyway. Those voting in the majority were also influenced by information from our UUMA-representative members who conveyed concern from UUMA leaders that students eligible for UUMA chapter participation as Candidates for Ministry be properly vetted by an RSCC.

The bottom line is that we are concerned that coming to an RSCC late in an aspirant's formation essentially sabotages the primary reason why the RSCC's were created in the first place, and that we are trying to change that by influencing the culture of the "marketplace". Our goal is to have the RSCC's be seen and function as bodies of advice and counsel for our new candidates, giving the MFC panel that eventually interviews the candidate a benchmark of advice which we find very valuable and to which candidates are held accountable. Our discussion in March included an opportunity for an informal evaluative conversation about the value of the RSCC's to the MFC process, and all members who spoke expressed their gratitude and appreciation for this front-end assessment and advice process as a resource for the MFC in our credentialing decisions. This proposed change will be shared with people who have interest in the health and well-being of the RSCC process to get their comments and feedback

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 presenter from the UUMA's CENTER program, Rev. Lynn Strauss, who explored issues of class and how they affect our perceptions of candidates.

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 feel honored and humbled by my work as chair of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, and was grateful for my reappointment to another two year term. The colleagues I work with on the MFC are among the best leaders the Unitarian Universalism has to offer. I speak for all our members in saying that we experience this work on behalf of our congregations as deeply meaningful and we are glad to be able to do it. We pledge our best efforts to you in the year ahead.