

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

Wayne Arnason, Chair May 6, 2013

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. In 2011 the 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 three meetings in a row (December 2011, and March and September 2012) with an extra interview panel. This allowed us to interview a total of thirty more candidates during this period than in previous years. After the September 2012 meeting we achieved our goal for a waiting period for appointments. That 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 come 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 Subcommittees. So they bring a wealth of experience to the table. Although this experiment was successful, the appointed members of the MFC felt good about returning in December 2012 to our usual two panels and fourteen members. It felt positively intimate!!

Candidate liaisons (ministers who have recently been awarded preliminary fellowship) always 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 was relatively stable this year compared to the turnover we experienced in 2011-12. We had one mid-year transition, as Jessica Halperin accepted a staff position at the UUA which required her to resign from the MFC. We will miss Jessica's leadership as Chair of our Process Working Group and a voice for young adult

perspectives. At this General Assembly, Rev. Debra Haffner will conclude five and a half years on the MFC. Debra has had a very fruitful term of service. As the founder and leader of a successful entrepreneurial interfaith non-profit concerned with sexual health (The Religious Institute) Debra has been a voice for the interests and perspectives of community-based ministers during her term of service. She was an advocate and resource person for a new sexual health competency for our candidates. She also created an on-line course at The Religious Institute to help candidates meet the sexual health competency requirements.

The members of the MFC continue to feel well-served by the Ministries and Faith Development staff who work on our behalf. Our Executive Secretary, Rev. Sarah Lammert, Rev. David Pettee in Ministerial Credentialing and our MFC Coordinator, Marion Bell are all veterans at this point, and know what we need before we do! Chris Spiegel is into her second year with us handling the needs of candidates as they prepare their packets and helping us schedule them. The greeting she receives from candidates before they interview with us is testimony to her good work. New to the staff this year is Rev. Alicia Forde, Professional Development Director. With big shoes to fill, Alicia has set them aside and brought her own shoes!! Her administrative competence, pastoral skills, and insights during panel discussions have been deeply appreciated.

This report routinely includes our statistics for the year:

67 candidates were interviewed in the past year. Of those, 53 were granted preliminary fellowship with or without minor contingencies, 9 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. Of all the candidates we saw this year 29 were from one of the two Unitarian Universalist "identity seminaries" (Meadville/Lombard Theological School or Starr King School for the Ministry), a ratio of 43%. The number of women exceeded male candidates (49 compared with 17) and 1 identified as transgender or genderqueer. During the course of the year, 45 ministers completed their first renewals; 46 completed second renewals; and 47 were granted Final Fellowship.

In addition, the Committee moved 5 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.

Last year we implemented recommendations in the UUA Administration's Strategic Review of Professional Ministry by making changes in the role and composition of our Regional Subcommittees on Candidacy (RSCC's). The Regional Subcommittees were reduced from four to two, and the number of meetings the two subcommittees have was increased from one each year to two each year. Our hope was that his decision would improve the culture and the quality of the evaluative and supportive work that these groups do for our aspirants towards ministry. This new configuration began with the fall 2012 meetings, and the feedback has been good from RSCC members and aspirants.

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 annually. This year, we brought in Jan Devor from the UUA's Religious Education Credentialing Program to present on how another UUA credentialing body has used Bloom's Taxonomy of interview questions as a tool for improving their questioning process.

Our own new business initiative this year was to undertake a multi-year review of the "competencies" for ministry that we ask candidates to demonstrate in their packets and their interviews. The competencies exist in archaeological layers that reflect different emphases and expectations for what ministers should be able to do that have evolved over time. The MFC has been contacting stakeholders in ministerial credentialing for advice, conducting research within other judicatories, and has requested input from aspirants, candidates, and individual members of UU congregations. We anticipate compiling the research information at the end of this year and seeing what it tells us about how we might improve the way that the competencies are defined and described.

The MFC made decisions in response to complaints against four ministers involving conduct unbecoming a minister. Decisions we make affecting a ministers' fellowship status, or decisions regarding their fellowship that ministers make in response to a complaint, are reported in the UU World. Several ministers continue to be in monitoring relationship with the MFC and are in conversation with the staff or Executive Committee regarding varying requirements imposed on them in response to their conduct.

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