

Ministerial Fellowship Committee Annual Report to the General Assembly

Wayne Arnason, Chair May 29, 2014

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.

This year, the MFC membership remained stable and we scheduled all three of our meetings with twenty candidate interviews served by two panels. Monitoring the waiting list and the way that the time lag to get an appointment can creep up beyond the usual one year, we plan right now to schedule the 2014-15 meetings with two extra interviews per meeting, with most members coming in a day earlier than usual to accommodate this extra panel, or to serve on our Executive Committee. Giving the MFC this extra day for the next three meetings is a gift from at least seven MFC members per meeting that will help us keep to our goal for appointments that are no more than one year out. That goal is to have most candidates scheduled for appointments no more than a year out from their first request.

We welcomed two new appointees to our committee this year: Lay member Nick Allen and Rev. Maddie Sifantus were both appointments made by the UUA Board. Having a core group of experienced members and staff members in support of both our panels and our business processes has been a great blessing this year. Occasionally, we bring in former members or Regional Subcommittee members as substitutes for regular appointees who must miss a meeting, and that will continue in the year ahead. Our experiment of having telephone meetings three times a year to discuss and vote on renewal of preliminary fellowship has gone well and relieved some stress from the face – to-face business sessions.

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, under the column on the left of the screen, by clicking on "Liaisons to Candidates".

The members of the MFC continue to feel well-served by the Ministries and Faith Development Staff Group who work on our behalf. We are deeply grateful to Executive Secretary, Rev. Sarah Lammert, Rev. David Pettee in Ministerial Credentialing and Alicia Forde, Director of Ministerial Development, and to our MFC Coordinator, Marion Bell, who handles all our logistics and Chris Spiegel who handles the needs of candidates as they prepare their packets and helps us schedule them.

This report routinely includes our statistics for the year:

Fifty-eight candidates were interviewed in the past year. Of those, 51 were granted preliminary fellowship with or without minor contingencies, 7 were seen as making promising progress towards ministry, but we would like to see them again, and no candidates were discouraged from continuing their pursuit of ministry. Of all the candidates we saw this year 24 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 (41 compared with 15) and 2 identified as transgender or genderqueer. During the course of the year, 43 ministers completed their first renewals; 48 completed second renewals; and 51 were granted Final Fellowship.

In addition, the Committee moved 6 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.

This year the Committee took action to request that the ministers whose settlement is on hold through the authority of the MFC and under the Supervision of a staff Review team be reported to us annually in the fall. The Chair and the Executive Secretary will review the list in advance to determine whether ministers in the hold status for more than three years should be invited to a fellowship review hearing with the Executive Committee.

Our major business undertaking this past year has been a review of the competencies that we have defined as required areas of knowledge, skill, and formation for all candidates for fellowship. We announced this two year study in the fall of 2012, and sought input from more than a dozen stakeholders in ministerial credentialing. We assessed the feedback and have begun drafting new versions of the competencies. We expect that this process will ultimately also involve a review of the questions we ask congregations to respond to about their ministers in preliminary fellowship, and an update of our reading list.

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 Rev. Parisa Parsa, to administer and interpret the results of the Intercultural Competency Instrument that has been an added tool for many UUA groups in our anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and multicultural work.

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, and some ministers choose to resign their fellowship rather than engage with a review on their fellowship status. The Executive Committee has drawn on the services of Rev. Deborah Pope-Lance, a community minister who has consulted many congregations that have experienced clergy sexual abuse, for advice on our role and process, and we are grateful to her. We are in continuing conversation with the Board of Trustees, to whom we are accountable, as they conduct a review of ministerial misconduct procedures.

I personally continue to feel honored and blessed by my work as chair of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, which is entering its final year of my limited term. 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.