

**Report of the Religious Education Credentialing Committee Credentialed Observer  
October 2004  
(Gaia Brown, credentialed religious educator, masters level)**

Here's what I would want to know about the RECC:

- That they have a thorough, thoughtful and fair process;
- That they themselves prepare thoroughly;
- That they represent and honor a diversity of viewpoints;
- That they honor our principles by respecting the value of each individual and showing compassion in human relationships;
- That at the same time they uphold the high standards necessary if the Credentialing process is to be credible.

If you share those concerns, then I am so glad you are reading this report. I was invited to be the observer of the RECC for the entire 4 ½ days of its October, 2004 meeting. I was invited as someone who had been through the credentialing process already. I had heard what the RECC thought about me; now I was able to return the favor. Here is what I observed:

The RECC is a diverse group of people. There are three non professionals from congregations spread across the country. They all have at least some background in education and they are all leaders in their home congregations. There is also a parish minister; a minister of religious education; a credentialed religious educator, masters level; and a representative of the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA). Rev. David Hubner, director of ministry and professional leadership for the UUA, and Rev. Beth Williams, director of the UUA's office of religious education credentialing, were also there as non-voting participants. Gina Ruvido, assistant in the office of R.E. credentialing, was the able scribe. None of the members is from traditionally oppressed groups, but the committee integrated anti-oppression training right into its first meeting, and now at each meeting the daily process observer lets the committee know how well it did in using an anti-oppression lens (and the marks were consistently good).

The RECC is an engaged group of people. Everyone came thoroughly prepared, and they continued to use their "free time" in the evenings for further study. A topic of concern raised one day would result in the presentation of a draft of a new document the next morning. But while the proceedings continued at a steady pace, they were not rushed, and some decisions were put off for a future meeting.

Like God looking at creation on the first five days, I can look on the committee and see that it is good. Will there ever be that final satisfaction that God had at the end of day six, when things were so complete that creation was "very good?" As UU's, we acknowledge that creation is ongoing. In the same way, the RECC might always be refining its processes. But I'm confident it will get very close to "very good."

Much meeting time was spend trying to nail down specifics. What rules and procedures does the RECC have (the UUA requires these)? How should the

competencies be laid out in the portfolio? What questions can be asked so that letters of endorsement and recommendation show the growing edges as well as the strengths of the candidates? And then there were generalities, most crucially, how to differentiate between what is expected at the credentialed level and the credentialed, masters level. At its February meeting the RECC had interviewed two credentialed, masters level candidates and one credentialed level. Now they were to see six candidates for the credentialed level. What were they looking for?

Here is the distinction I heard: At the credentialed level, the committee wants to see that the candidate not only has experienced certain and various educational opportunities and reflected upon them, but has also integrated, or knows how to integrate, the learnings into the work s/he does. At the masters level, they expect true mastery of the competencies. Yes, there will be some competencies in which the candidate excels more than others, but none of them should be weak.

The RECC spent the first 2 ½ days talking policy. Then they moved into interviews with candidates. Once in the interview room, a candidate's "reader" presented the portfolio to the rest of the RECC. Having known about this practice, I had not realized how carefully *every* member of the committee had read (and re-read) each portfolio, taking notes, making grids, or using some other method to evaluate the competencies and other materials. While the "reader" had prepared an initial list of questions for the candidate, almost every member would add more questions of his/her own.

A final list of questions was prepared, including both some "soft" questions to help the candidate feel at ease and also some tough questions, particularly when a competency had been less well presented in the portfolio. And here is a thing that really impressed me: as the committee decided on the final list, it was evident that they were attempting with each question to "open a door" for the candidate, to give the candidate an opportunity to shine where s/he excelled or to else to make a creditable case for her/his knowledge and skills where the portfolio was not compelling.

A discussion and determination followed each interview. It was here that I realized how much the committee members had made a point of waiting until the interview itself to form an opinion about the candidate. Reactions and reflections were shared. It was easier than I had thought it would be to identify strengths and weaknesses. What was more difficult was deciding what to do about the weaknesses. The committee members were well aware that each candidate had worked hard and had come with a hopeful heart. The discussion centered on the question, "What can we ask for to give this candidate another opportunity to demonstrate the ability and/or knowledge that s/he feels is there but we have not yet seen?" The attitude was one of compassion and/or pastoral concern; although the candidate was not in the room, her/his spirit was being honored at all times.

Then in each case, the candidate was invited back in. Some were greeted with very good news. Others got news that was no doubt hard to take, but at least during this

set of interviews, they were close enough to the goal that their additional work would be reviewed by the committee without them having to appear again. The door was still open.

While I give the RECC very high marks for its ability and willingness to help the less fully successful candidates have another opportunity to receive the desired status, I did note that they had not yet adequately addressed the question, “What attitude should we show towards the candidate if the answer is *Not yet*.” There was a quick regrouping after the less successful interviews, but when the candidate returned, the committee’s discomfort seemed palpable. While this was at least in part due to compassion, I think the candidates deserve a committee that is more at ease with the responsibility it must take for its decisions. The candidate would be anxious enough, without being in a room of anxious people. There also has yet to be a candidate who fails, but the committee should prepare itself for that eventuality.

David Hubner did decide he should walk out with *all* candidates, so that he could reassure and answer questions for those who had such a need (and so that outside observers would not be able to read anything into the fact if David exited the interview with the candidate). And the committee did discuss the need to find a better way to handle that potentially difficult moment. I am confident that they will address this prior to interviewing more candidates.

Credentialing of religious educators is a new concept for us, and the RECC is even newer. But it is up and running, and as a person who has now observed it from the inside as well as the outside, I can say, “It’s good.”