

OBSERVATIONS

Of the Meeting of the Religious Education Credentialing Committee (RECC)
February 14 to 17, 2005

This committee is an excellent, hard-working group, devoted to the profession of religious education and the development of religious educators. Several religious professionals had to arrange to be away from their churches for most of a week to be here; a lay member gives up two of four vacation weeks to serve on this committee. Besides the two yearly meetings, there is a lot of homework, especially at this stage in the implementation of the program. It became more and more apparent over the days that every member is very conscientious about this homework.

At check-in I could tell this is a group that is comfortable together, but not overly informal. As the days went on, tension was often broken with humor, but never in relation to a participant in the program. Present or absent, known to members or not, participants were always treated with the utmost respect.

All of us, especially those of us who will someday replace members of this committee, owe a great debt to the current members, who are not only doing the work of credentialing, but also laying the groundwork, the policies and procedures for the committee, the participants, and the staff to follow. Two full meeting days were spent on that work before the first candidate was seen or discussed. Their responsibilities also include determining good publicity vehicles for promoting the program, and generating that publicity.

Review of draft policies and procedures: Much progress was made, but the review did not get through the full draft. One touchstone for this work is considering the parallels are with the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC), partly for ideas for workable policies, partly to maintain equivalency between the committees. David Hubner's presence is invaluable for this.

Anti-oppression work: Quite a bit of work was done on equivalencies – granting one at this meeting, and setting up criteria for others. This was so important because it enables credentialing for those whose life circumstances or background don't fit the mold for obtaining these credentials.

The committee made time to hear Gail Forsyth Vail's report on the work of the Integrity Team of LREDA, which also shows how important the committee deems this area. She reported on an almost-ready new brochure on several factors bearing on anti-racist work in RE: appropriation, welcoming space, and curriculum. RECC sees this as a resource for at least the Associate level. The RECC moved to add a new piece on anti-oppression for themselves – all will read an essay recommended by a person of color or other oppressed group for each meeting and discuss. I was inspired by their work on this to give myself an

assignment to deepen my thought and practice in this area – to read the reading list book by Kivel and to review Soul Work and write a short paper for myself on how to incorporate the insights in my work.

Seeing Candidates: As the committee reads more packets and sees more candidates, they are moved to define requirements more fully and craft assignments carefully, to be sure candidates demonstrate their skills. They also consider how to allow different individuals to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in their own ways by allowing different modes of presentation, if possible. They also think about individuals in terms of type of church(es) served, age, geographical location, i.e., proximity to resources such as role models, etc. – all while keeping a vision of valid standards.

In all of this, I observed great efforts for balancing care for individuals and for the profession. Responsibility to congregations was demonstrated by rigorous standards for skills developed and thought given to safe congregation and responsible staffing practices. The greatest intensity was given to planning for the interviews, endeavoring to make them as smooth and non-threatening as possible for the candidates, while thorough enough for a good decision. If they could not give a fully positive answer to the candidate, they were prepared by having given deep consideration to the ramifications.

They see the need soon to be able to see more candidates during a meeting period, while keeping the same degree of thoroughness and care and a manageable workload. Tight, clear portfolios will help, and the committee has already started specifying what will make portfolios tight and clear.

When evaluating after an interview, I noted how they enjoyed the candidate's good points and "celebrated a good professional", while being frank and unwavering about weaknesses. I can see that they are reaching clarity about when contingencies need to be placed on a credential.

Pointers for candidates:

The committee loved an equivalency packet that was very clearly documented – what work was done, number of hours, etc. Any packet/portfolio that is clear, well-organized, and not loaded with less-pertinent material will make a favorable impression, and make the members' workload easier – which they will use to the benefit of all candidates.

Not all candidates interpreted some of the areas of competency in the same way as the committee. I have suggested to the RECC that they provide brief definitions, but unless they do that, I suggest you check with a couple of colleagues and/or ministers to learn what the title means in the world of the "UU professional."

The portfolio isn't everything. Some candidates were able to show strengths in the interview that didn't come through clearly in the portfolio. Bless the RECC for crafting the interview to allow for that to happen, even if some questions seem difficult. And bless them for taking on this large task with such dedication.

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