

**Credentialed Observer's Report
Religious Education Credentialing Committee
Boston, MA — 27-31 March 2006**

Being an observer, as well as an active participant in discussions, was an honor and a privilege. I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this important process.

When I read over previous reports from Credentialed Observers, the recurring theme was one of great respect and acknowledgment of the work of Committee members. After spending this week with the Committee, I certainly echo those words. I wish especially to acknowledge the work and commitment of the lay members of the Committee. The daunting agenda for this meeting was achieved, in part, by the effective leadership of the Committee chair, Liz Jones.

What I learned

Not surprisingly, what most of us know about this Committee, even those of us who have met with them during the credentialing process, is the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The work of this Committee certainly includes reviewing materials submitted by candidates for credentialing and meeting with these candidates, but the majority of the time this Committee met was devoted to issues of policy, reviewing and revising requirements, and other "behind-the-scenes" business.

I was particularly impressed with the extent to which each Committee member examined the submitted portfolios. The discussions surrounding these documents reflected a thorough reading and deep understanding of their contents.

Clearly, this Committee strives to support both the credentialing process and the people who participate in it. Committee members struggle to balance the rigor and standards necessary for credentialing with the individuality of those working to meet these goals. Indeed, a significant portion of the meeting was devoted to discussions on how to bridge the gap that may at times exist between the two.

What I share

Participating with this Committee during one meeting provides a perspective, but a limited one, on a process that continues throughout the year. My comments here are made in that context.

The Committee has incorporated a strong anti-racism/anti-oppression/multiculturalism component in its deliberations. This is commendable and consistent with efforts throughout our faith community; as Unitarian Universalists, we strive to be as inclusive as possible. I encourage the Committee to continue being cognizant of the physical and other challenges faced by people who will be interacting with this group and to work to accommodate them.

The Committee does an excellent job of hearing all of the voices at the table. I encourage it as well to listen for those voices that may not be there and to continue to keep in mind the rich diversity of our congregations in terms of size, staffing, support, and resources.

The credentialing process asks candidates to be familiar with different learning practices, recognizing that we each have preferred learning styles or approaches. These differences extend to ways we, in turn, are able to absorb and process requests for this learned information. I encourage the Committee itself to apply that knowledge and to find ways to acknowledge these differences, especially during the interview process with individuals seeking credentialing status.

In asking candidates to identify their "growing edges," there may be cultural or other barriers that make it difficult to share such information with the same group that will be determining whether they have met the requirements of the program. Demonstration of self-knowledge of one's areas of incomplete growth is very valuable, but I would recommend a clear statement that this will not be used against them, assuming that is indeed true.

On occasion the Committee seemed to get bogged down in wordsmithing. I encourage the group to work on minimizing this as a collective effort and maximizing the Committee's time together for other activities.

I want to emphasize, though, the major conclusion I reached: namely, that this committee is doing a fantastic job in the development, evolution, and implementation of credentialing religious education professionals.

What I see

The Religious Education Credentialing Committee has evolved. Its initial charge was to develop a credentialing program model for religious educators and to seek approval of such a program from various constituencies. Once the program was authorized, the Committee began reviewing individual applications from people seeking credentialing status. Along with that came the responsibility for establishing formal regulations within the Unitarian Universalist Association framework as well as ongoing efforts to refine and modify the specific credentialing process. Rather than being a sequential process, this appears to be primarily a cumulative one. The result is an ever-increasing workload. Although the Committee does have several subcommittees to handle specific tasks, the Committee remains the official group to make decisions in all of these areas. At some point it may be useful to determine whether a different model for meeting all of these obligations might be more appropriate.

The process of establishing a credentialing program for religious educators benefited significantly from the program already in place for granting fellowship to ministers. Although not entirely analogous, the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and the Religious Education Credentialing Committee share a number of attributes. However, as the credentialing process for religious educators continues to develop, I hope the

Committee will explore ways of weaning itself from the established Ministerial Fellowship Committee model. While there will always be shared features, it may be appropriate to envision the future of credentialing of religious educators through a new lens.

I want to thank, once again, each member of the Religious Education Credentialing Committee for his/her continuing commitment and support of this program.

In faith,

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