

Religious Education Credentialing Committee
Spring Meeting
March 12-15, 2007

Credentialed Observer's Report

I am writing this report as the sixth Credentialed Observer for the UUA's Religious Education Credentialing Committee. The mission of the Religious Education Committee (RECC) is to develop professional standards and credentialed religious educators to serve the Unitarian Universalist denominations.

Observer Responsibilities

According to the list of responsibilities sent to me by Beth Williams, The RE Credentialing Director at the UUA in Boston, the Observer's responsibilities include:

- Receive all candidates' packets and read before the meeting
- Actively participate in full committee meetings and sub-committee meetings
- Attend all candidate interviews and all discussions regarding the interviews
- Ask questions (or not) during the interviews
- Participate in straw votes (or not) on candidate' final status but not the final vote.
- Present the committee with both a short oral report on my observations at the end of the meeting and a written report with a couple of weeks.

My Reflections

Liz Jones was the Committee Chair and also the LREDA representative and currently works as Director of Religious Education at the First UU Church in San Diego, California. She led an efficient, well organized meeting with an agenda that had been set prior to the meeting. She kept committee members on track with the agenda. Beth Williams was not able to join us until mid-week and some of the agenda items were postponed until she arrived because her input was needed. Liz consulted with her colleagues about rearranging the agenda before doing so. Under her excellent leadership, much was accomplished during the four days together.

Each morning the committee began with a lighting of the chalice and opening words. It felt like a sacred space was created so the members could work respectfully with one another. In addition, I felt a sense of reverence in our meeting room and in the room that was used for the interviews. At the closing of each day, someone from the committee used the *Process Observation Form* to report how the day's meeting went. Following the report, someone read closing words and the chalice candle was extinguished.

I commend Paula Welling, the new Religious Education department's assistant. She had only been working in this position for three weeks. Paula was calm and efficient in recording information on her computer. Before we arrived she prepared the binders we received on the first day. The contents were well organized and this made it easy to

locate the material needed. I would like to thank her and Beth Williams for the preparation done before we met. Their preparation made the four days flow in an effective, highly productive manner.

Words that come to mind to describe the committee members are pioneering spirit, dedication to the further education and development of religious educators in the UU congregations, commitment, integrity, hard working, sensitive and compassionate individuals. Some of the RECC members have been on the committee since its formation four years ago. It speaks well of their continued commitment and dedication to creating professional guidelines for religious educators seeking credentialing.

AR/AO issues were addressed on Day 1 when we met with Rev. Nancy Palmer Jones, minister of the San Jose church. She is a **JUUST Change** Consultant and committed to anti-racism and anti-oppression issues within our UU denomination. We had an opportunity to share our earliest memory of racism or oppression. She encouraged us to draw on our deep knowledge by telling our stories.

Committee members continued to work on making sure the reading list had books that addressed anti-racism and anti-oppression. One of the exhibits reviewed and discussed was a letter from the librarian at Meadville Lombard regarding the availability of books on tape or other electronic media. This was in response to a candidate that was having difficulty finishing her reading list because of a visual learning challenge.

Beth Dana, from the Youth Ministry office of the UUA, did a power point presentation about Youth Ministry. She was well organized and very professional. There was concern, from RECC members, about not having clear and effective standards for Youth Advisors that would empower them as leaders. She asked for suggestions and many were made. I was amazed at how quickly she was able to input these suggestions into her computer. It would have been helpful if there is a pause between each suggestion made so that Beth and others present could really listen and absorb that information. Following her visit, one of the committee members suggested a new book to read about youth called *When Youth Lead*.

Interview Process

The interviews took place on day two. There were two candidates being interviewed, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. One was applying for Credential Level and the other candidate was applying for a Master's Level credential. Each candidate had been assigned a reader and this person reviewed the portfolio and made recommendations to the committee. Everyone on the committee received a copy of each portfolio prior to meeting and read them as well. The portfolios were evaluated on their contents and suggestions were made.

RECC members actively engaged in the formation of interview questions. They were well thought out questions and appropriate to the level of credential being sought. Each interview began with lighting of a chalice and the interviewee presenting opening words. Halfway through the interview process there was a minute pause. I noticed that after this, each candidate seemed more relaxed. Following the interview, committee members

evaluated the candidate. Liz, as committee chair, kept everyone on track. Strengths of the candidate were acknowledged first. Everyone engaged in this discussion. Concerns were discussed next. This process was done with careful discernment and sensitivity.

Recommendations

- If there is a presenter and questions or suggestions are being made, to slow down and pause before each one.
- Noticed the energy was low in the afternoons. Taking energy breaks up to five minutes to breathe deeply, stretch, do some simple exercises to get the body, mind and spirit reenergized.
- Practice self-care during the four days of meetings. The workdays were long and intense. Some members worked at night to finish the competencies and book list. Most members of the committee work full time at demanding jobs and would be returning to these upon leaving the meeting. My concern is for their continued attention to good self-care practices that will nourish them in body, mind and spirit so burnout does not happen.

Words are difficult to capture the Spirit in the room those 4 days. **Thank you** for all the gifts you are bringing to our faith tradition. It was an honor to be an observer to this group of dedicated and committed UU's. I left energized and hopeful for the future of our Unitarian Universalist ministry to the children, youth and adults of our congregation. Closing words from *Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience*: "When we are trying to create change, we can pour ourselves into the endeavor and do our best to accomplish our goal, doing our absolute best to speak, to create."

Julie Malm

Credentialed Religious Educator – Master's level