

It has been a special honor and pleasure to witness to and participate in the work of the religious education credentialing committee. (RECC). My gratitude for this position is immense for I realize the the committee's work is indispensable for the professionalization of religious educators and when that is attended to, the entire Unitarian Universalist faith and all the people who are a part of it are strengthened and deepened.

My observations for this week inform me that while recognizing the practices of reason, critical thinking, democracy, and decisions based on evidence, you also recognize and provide space for compassion, empathy, love and grace. The balance you achieve is admirable and practical and sets a tone for the candidate interviews that is respectful, caring and fair. You combine the best of Unitarian and Universalist practices and traditions. What the credentialing program asks of candidates, you also ask of yourselves before and during this week. What did I see and hear and intuit? It is obvious that each of you realize the importance of thorough preparation and then implementation of your work. While I couldn't observe your work previous to this meeting, the results of that are obvious.

1. You have built complete trust in each other and the process.
2. You respect the work of each other.
3. You look for ways to express gratitude and do it frequently.
4. You adjust when necessary with a nimble and deft touch.
5. You delegate and refer to others not on this committee when necessary, thus not trying to solve all problems or issues.
6. You support each other when there is doubt, confusion or disagreement.

You have wisely supported and appreciated and treasured and often defer to the experience of the two, long-serving lay members who provide perspective, an institutional memory and accumulated wisdom. While last year there was anxiety about the number of candidates for this year, I could sense little of that during this week. The gentle counseling of Steve Lynn and the confidence he shows in each of you and in the process provided a calm centering to the group.

It is also clear to me that you value efficiency and highly organized systems, though allowing and sometimes welcoming the unexpected. While there could have been deep anxiety with the absence of Reverend Beth Williams' guidance and support, I did not observe this. The collective wisdom, maturity and dedication to high standards does not replace Beth's, but has clearly enabled you to continue and complete the work of evaluating candidates.

This was obvious especially with the use of time. Each day's agenda, though full, felt more like a dance than a rigid structure. With Jan's deft facilitation of tasks, you used occasional extra time for further evaluation of particular candidates, for self-care and for the next day's preparation. Paula Welling's assistance in almost all realms and her gentle and calm nature also supported the work of this committee.

Concerns with practicing anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism were revealed on the first day, setting a tone of intentionality and self-evaluation. One of your member's pointed out the 'whiteness' of this committee and the same for the candidates seen this year. While this committee doesn't choose the ethnicity, color, or gender, there may be opportunities to actively advise, collaborate with and encourage LREDA, congregations, and the UUA and district staff to support the diversity of candidates and the committee. You also chose to view a film that dealt with oppression of and racism towards Native Americans and then discussed the damage done to family systems when these occur. The challenges with technology, lack of a projector for desired power point presentations, may also be construed as inhibiting candidates' various ways of expressing their knowledge or be an accessibility issue.

I've also observed the desire to continually fine-tune or 'get-it-right' evaluation process. You commented on revisions of some interview questions and the deletion of others. You clarified the needs for obviously demonstrated examples of leadership for the Master level. You affirmed the correctness and efficacy of a congratulatory letter sent by the committee. You realize the important of mentors who've been given the credentialed status and verbally encouraged this week's candidates to become mentors. You heard that the recommendation form is too involved and because you want to get timely and accurate information from this, may consider changing it.

Finally, your joy and high hopes for this work is commendable. While exhibiting professionalism in your demeanor and actions, there has been a lightness, laughter, and good -natured teasing which balances the tension of time constraints and difficult decisions. Openings and closings for each day refreshed the committee, provided focus and affirmed each other and this work.

It is more than obvious you do the work not just for the professionalization of religious educators but for the laity which they serve and ultimately for the growth of the Unitarian Universalist faith and individuals.

With deep gratitude and in faith,
Benette Sherman
Credentialed Observer