

It is again a gift and delight to be among such a well organized, positive, caring and hard-working group. Two years ago you wondered with a some anxiety how you would ever see ten candidates and last year you wondered how you would function effectively with two staff leaving the credentialing program. But as you know you prevailed with grace and accomplishments.

Several candidates told you that the credentialing process was a gift, a process that may have been started with trepidation but ended with illumination that they are indeed accomplished religious professionals. They might not have this awareness were it not for your work behind the scenes---fine tuning the requirements, correcting past mistakes, crafting clear questions, and maintaining high standards with confidence that candidates would reach them.

This transition year could have been challenging but I have seen no indication of balls dropped, personalities injured or business not done well. I have no doubt this smooth transition is due to the excellent management and social skills of both Jans--Jan Devor and Jan Gartner. It's also my assumption that the executive committee and/or equivalency committee also devotes much time 'behind the scenes' during the year.

I have danced in many contra dances which require a caller, musicians and dancers. The caller cues the dancers to swing or bow or do-si-do The musicians provide the beginning, the rhythm and the ending, while the dancers complete the choreography and tie it altogether. The beautiful aspect of contra dancing is that when all these elements work together well---the caller fades, the music can even fade out and yet the dancers continue to do the steps hearing the music in their heads.

You are like these dancers. Jan Devor as committee chair provides the cues, asks for the group to practice and then trusts that the dance will be well done and will be beautiful in its execution. Over the years you have developed a deep trust in each other that is obvious and really quite astounding. The trust must come from knowing that each of you is: accountable, responsible, creative, articulate and caring. Being together as a well practiced team for years might predict some arrogance or slacking off, but I saw absolutely no indication of this. On the contrary I saw fresh approaches, energy, and continued determination to 'get the process right'.

Generally, I saw over the last few days:

intentional welcoming to and appreciation of the new committee member, Janice and new staff members, Jan Gartner and Stephanie members on time and well-prepared at each meeting which allowed for a more open schedule than anticipated
checking and re-checking for understanding of decisions
efforts to always look for the positive first before addressing negative aspects
fine-tuning adjustments that were helpful or will be helpful in the future
helpful openings and closings that allowed the group time for centering, gratitude, silence, unity, and sacred space.
flexibility and going with the flow
eager open-ness to Sara Lammert's insights
enthusiasm for new ideas that advance the value of the credentialing program

Specifically, I noticed the following:

- Honest and open communication
- Some lack of inclusion by not waiting for 2 committee members or checking on them before dinner---on the first night this could have been more welcoming
- Tandi reminded the group to discern carefully about each candidate and not to be swayed from a strong opinion by the group, but to keep talking
- Linda wondered if her expectations of candidates are sometimes too high and Jan D suggests they are.
- Jan G reminded the group that major changes cannot be made to the program at this time per the groups' past decisions.
- Many supported Jan D after she presented the news to a candidate who was not granted the status sought knowing that delivering such news is difficult.
- Jan D apologizes for asking a work question before the opening one day
appropriate laughter and fun
- Jan D is particularly adept at setting candidates at ease and in contributing levity to the committee when needed or appropriate

Gesturers of simple helping: to Jan G in carrying items here and there--to Stephanie for small tasks--Janice asks Jan G how things are going with her.

Suggestions

- If a covenant exists within the committee why not revisit it for the sake of newcomers or just to remind each other of the importance of staying in right relations.
- In more detailed discussions perhaps the tried and true practice of raising hands would ensure all are heard equally and fairly.
- Consider inviting only credentialed master level religious professionals in the future. This might avoid awkwardness if a credentialed professional observer decides to pursue the master level and then also appear before the RECC.

I am so grateful to have this opportunity to observe your process again and to participate in the very important work with all of you. You do this work in an excellent fashion with seriousness, dedication and deep caring for each other and the profession of religious education, and with the growth and health of congregations in mind.

In faith and with respect,
Benette Sherman
Credentialed Lifespan Religious Educator