

Ministerial Fellowship Committee Annual Report to the General Assembly

The Rev. Dr. Wayne Arnason, Chair

May 21, 2015

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) is a by-law defined committee of the UUA Board of Trustees charged with broad responsibilities for credentialing Unitarian Universalist ministers for service in our association of congregations and for insuring the ethical integrity of our credentialed ministry. The Committee meets three times each year to interview candidates for preliminary fellowship, to review renewals of preliminary fellowship, to grant final fellowship, and to consider circumstances and charges which could lead to a change in the fellowship status of a minister.

This year, the MFC membership remained stable, with occasional substitutes drawn from the Regional Subcommittees of the MFC taking the place of members with health or travel-related absences. We want to thank Linnea Huston for filling in for two meetings for lay member Nick Allen who had a study opportunity abroad this year. The year ahead marks a major transition in the membership of the MFC. I am completing my final eligible term of service and will be leaving the role of chair after seven and a half years on June 30, 2015. Three other members whose terms match my own will be leaving: Psychologist Tony Stringer, lay member Karen Eng, and UUMA appointee Howard Dana. In addition two members with two terms of service will be leaving: Rev. Karen Gustafson and lay member Mark Watanabe. Each of these people has made valued contributions as leaders within the MFC and they deserve your gratitude and praise. This large a turnover has happened occasionally in the past, but it is always a challenge when it happens again. Happily, we have an excellent new chair coming in: Jesse King of Evergreen CO. Mr. King is a lifelong UU who works in organizational development. He has served on an MFC Regional Subcommittee, and as an MFC substitute member. Jesse joined us for the full April 2015 meeting and is well prepared for this role. The usual continuing education sessions that the MFC holds twice a year will next year be devoted to orientation of new members and review of basic functions of the MFC.

We normally schedule our meetings with twenty candidate interviews served by two panels. We continue to have telephone meetings three times a year to discuss and vote on renewals of preliminary fellowship and occasionally other business. This year we made provisions at two of our meetings to schedule two extra interviews, with members coming in a day earlier than usual to accommodate an extra panel. Our goal was to keep up with the demand for interviews such that most candidates scheduled for appointments wait no more than a year out from their first request. However, our efforts were frustrated by cancellations of appointments previously confirmed, and each meeting this year has seen each panel sitting idle during at least one time slot.

Candidate liaisons (ministers who have recently been awarded preliminary fellowship) always sit in on panels and participate fully without voting. They also participate in the business sessions, both confidential and non-confidential. The non-confidential business sessions are always open to the public as per UUA policy. People who wish to read more about the internal workings of the MFC might find the liaisons' reports interesting. They can be found on the UUA's web site, at <http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/mfc/liaisons>.

The members of the MFC continue to feel well-served by the Ministries and Faith Development Staff Group who work on our behalf. We are deeply grateful to Executive

Secretary, Rev. Sarah Lammert, Rev. David Pettee in Ministerial Credentialing and Alicia Forde, Director of Ministerial Development, and to our MFC Coordinator, Marion Bell, who handles all our logistics and Chris Spiegel who handles the needs of candidates as they prepare their packets and helps us schedule them.

This report routinely includes our statistics for the year:

Sixty-three candidates were interviewed in the past year. Of those, 58 were granted preliminary fellowship with or without minor contingencies, four were seen as making promising progress towards ministry, but we would like to see them again, and one candidate was discouraged from continuing their pursuit of ministry. This is a striking statistic! 92% of the candidates we saw this year were experienced as ready to go forward into our ministry. I've seen this statistic hover in the 2/3 range in the past. Of all the candidates we saw this year 32 were from one of the two Unitarian Universalist "identity seminaries" (Meadville/Lombard Theological School or Starr King School for the Ministry). That's a higher percentage from identity schools coming through than we have seen during my tenure as chair. Overall, these numbers reflect my own positive assessment about how much better prepared and formed our candidates are becoming. The number of women exceeded male candidates (40 compared with 22) and one identified as transgender or genderqueer. During the course of the year, 43 ministers completed their first renewals; 53 completed second renewals; and 41 were granted Final Fellowship. In addition, the Committee moved four ministers in Preliminary Fellowship from Full Fellowship to Inactive Fellowship. These ministers are not currently working in ministry and not engaged in the process of renewal towards Final Fellowship. They may be moved back into Full Fellowship on petition to the Committee.

This year the Committee took action on a minister whose settlement had been on hold through the authority of the MFC and under the Supervision of a staff Review Team. The hold was lifted with certain contingencies and the minister cleared for settlement. Ministers with settlement holds due to difficult departures from congregations are now reported to us annually in the fall. The Chair and the Executive Secretary review the list to determine whether ministers in the hold status for more than three years should be invited to a fellowship review hearing with the Executive Committee.

Our major item of business this year involved the next steps in the review of the competencies that we have defined as required areas of knowledge, skill, and formation for all candidates for fellowship. We first announced this project in the fall of 2012. We were informed along the way by the study of ministerial competencies and skills commissioned by the UUA and UU Ministers Association published in spring 2013. This year we sent our first draft of new competencies back to the dozen stakeholders in ministerial credentialing that we had initially consulted in 2012-13. We will share a nearly-finished draft at the 2015 General Assembly. Next year we will complete the review by revising the questions we ask congregations to respond to about their ministers in preliminary fellowship, and by updating our reading list. Current candidates should expect an announcement late next year clarifying when people entering formation will be accountable to the new competencies. Generally changes like this do not effect people who are currently aspirants or candidates for ministry or they are given a choice about whether to be accountable to the older or newer standards.

The MFC Executive Committee has to deal with occasional complaints against ministers regarding their professional behavior and fellowship status. Decisions affecting a ministers' fellowship status are reported in the UU World after they are made, and some

ministers choose to resign their fellowship rather than engage with a review on their fellowship status. The Executive Committee has continued in conversation and collaboration with the UUA Board of Trustees, to whom we are accountable, as they conducted a review of ministerial misconduct procedures. We met with UUA Moderator Jim Key and Board member Susan Weaver in April 2015. As a result of our collaboration and the work of the Board's Congregational Boundaries Working Group, we have implemented or submitted a number of rule and policy changes that reflect best practices in responding ministerial misconduct and protecting the rights of victims of that misconduct.

The year ended on a sad and difficult note as financial pressures forced the UUA Administration to recommend a budget for FY 2016 that discontinues the services of our MFC Regional Subcommittees and seeks to take the first steps in a new In-Care system for ministerial aspirants and candidates as our new approach to front-end support for ministerial formation. A letter from Rev. Sarah Lammert explaining this decision can be found at:

http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/rscc_letter_to_uu_leaders_signed_letter.pdf

The MFC had asked the staff for our routine five year evaluation of the RSCC program back in January, and had received this review from Rev. David Pettee at the same time the UUA Administration announced the budget recommendation they were making. The timing of this decision was such that the MFC had little choice but to accept the decision and pass new policies that describe the transition from aspirant to candidate as now based on submitting written evaluations, and that describe how people who were in care of RSCC's or held back by them can have another chance to continue on their path to ministry. We are deeply grateful for all the dedicated volunteers who served in the Regional Subcommittees Program of the MFC, and we look forward to the leadership of staff and UUMA chapters in creating a supportive and challenging In-Care program as part of our ministerial formation.

These are difficult and challenging times to feel a call to Unitarian Universalist Ministry. Our seminaries and their students are all under financial pressure, and the congregations and community institutions that our new ministers aspire to serve are struggling to adapt to the new realities of ministry for the 21st century. I have been honored and blessed to serve as the chair of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee during these years, and to be given the opportunity to make a contribution towards the formation of our next generation of ministers. Working with my colleagues on the committee and on the staff has been especially satisfying. I am ready to let the role go and will be glad to have time for other things as I contemplate retirement from full-time settled ministry at the 2016 General Assembly.

However, I know that even though I will relish more personal time, I will miss reading the stories of the lives that my thirty MFC packets each year would hold. Year after year, the packets our candidates submit are reminders that Unitarian Universalism saves and redeems lives. This is a faith worthy of our best institutional and spiritual leadership. Your Ministerial Fellowship Committee is committed to doing its part to insuring that the quality of this leadership continues to become even better.