
Ministerial Fellowship Committee Annual Report to the General Assembly

Jesse King – May 2016

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 has been a year of transitions and the culmination of a significant project. The transition activity was primarily the result of committee members leaving and the on boarding on new members. The significant project was the completion of the “MFC Competency Document”, along with the integrated and updated reading list for new ministers.

Transitions

Since the last annual report the MFC held three meetings: two in 2015, one in September and one in December, and the third in April of 2016. The September meeting started with six new committee members. The following individuals transitioned off of the MFC in July of 2015: the chair, Rev. Dr. Wayne Arnason, Rev. Howard Dana, Karen Eng, Rev. Karen Gustafson, Dr. Tony Stringer, and Mark Watanabe. The departure of these individuals had a profound impact on the committee; their leadership, wisdom, compassion, and dedication to the movement will be missed on this committee.

The six new members who joined the committee in September meeting included: the Rev. Jacqueline Clement, Jan Devor, Dr. Michael Lyde, Dr. Joetta Prost, Rev. Greg Ward, and myself. In September the committee was blessed by, and benefitted greatly from, the wonderful “new member orientation” that was facilitated by the Rev. Howard Dana, the former vice-chair of the MFC.

Other transitions include the gracious and thoughtful leadership provided by:

- Rev. Shana Lynngood of Victoria BC, accepting the position as the MFC’s vice chair.
- Rev. Marge Corletti of Arlington VA, accepting the position as chair of the MFC’s subcommittee, the Process Working Group.
- Rev. Madeleine Sifantus of Santa Paula CA, accepting the position as chair of the MFC’s subcommittee, the Settlement Working Group.
- Jan Devor of Denver CO, accepting the position as chair of the MFC’s subcommittee, the Candidacy Working Group.

And finally, two more transitions are important mention, in April of this year Rev. Gary Smith and Dr. Bill Kirkpatrick announced unexpected resignations from the MFC. Both are leaving for personal and professional commitments unrelated to their exceptional service on the MFC. The wisdom, insights, love, and humor these two provided the MFC will be sorely missed. As with those who served

before them, please join us in expressing a profound sense of gratitude for Gary's and Bill's service, leadership, and dedication given to the MFC and our movement.

UUA and UUMA

Sincere appreciation needs to be expressed for the exceptional support, thoughtfulness, and hard work provided by the staff of the Ministries and Faith Development Group. The MFC's effectiveness is largely dependent on the dedication, support, and encouragement provided by the MFC Coordinator, Marion Bell, Ministerial Credentialing Administrator, Chris Spiegel; and their team members, the Rev. Alicia Forde, Professional Development Director, the Rev. David Pettee, Ministerial Credentialing Director, and the Rev. Sarah Lammert the, Director of Ministries and Faith Development.

The UUA by-laws related to this committee require that four of the committee members are appointed by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, while the other members are appointed by the UUA Board. In an effort to continue strengthening the good relationship and understanding between the UUMA and the MFC, the Rev. Don Southworth, Executive Director of the UUMA visited the April 2016 MFC meeting. It was a delight having Don visit with the MFC as he was able to observe a day's worth of interviews and get a feel for the work, challenges, and the experience of being a part of this committee. The Committee also benefited by hearing about the direction of the UUMA and some of the challenges they are facing.

Candidate Liaisons

MFC Candidate Liaisons are ministers who have recently been awarded preliminary fellowship. They serve as volunteers and sit in on panels and participate fully, with the exception of the final votes. They also attend the business meetings, both confidential and non-confidential. The MFC's non-confidential business sessions are open to the public as per UUA policy. The Candidate Liaisons submit reports for each meeting which are posted on the UUA's website. <http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/mfc/liaisons> These reports provide valuable insights into the MFC process and very useful feedback for this committee.

Meeting Data

The three annual MFC meetings are scheduled to accommodate twenty candidate interviews at each meeting. Ideally, ten candidates are scheduled per panel, with each panel consisting of seven committee members and two UUA staff. The objective is to create sufficient interview spaces to meet the demand. However, it should be noted that at two meetings the committee was faced with cancellations resulting in two open interview appointment spaces in December of 2015 and two open appointment spaces in April of 2016. The following data provides a glimpse of the meeting activity:

- 56 of candidates were interviewed in the past year
- 48 granted preliminary fellowship with or without minor contingencies
- 6 of candidates were making progress towards ministry and were asked to return to the MFC
- For one candidate it was determined that there was considerable doubt as to whether they candidate met the general qualifications of Unitarian Universalist ministry. This individual was informed that if they wished to apply for another interview, they must submit a request to the MFC Executive Committee.
- Unfortunately, for one candidate the MFC saw no potential for the candidate in Unitarian Universalist ministry, and discouraged the candidate from further preparation. This individual was also informed that if they wished to apply for another interview, they must submit a request to the MFC Executive Committee.
- 26 of candidates came from the two Unitarian Universalist “identity seminaries”, 2 from Starr King School for the Ministry and 24 from Meadville Lombard Theological School
- The candidate interviews consisted 40 women and 16 men
- 61 minister completed their first renewals
- 46 ministers completed their second renewals
- 56 ministers were granted Final Fellowship
- 6 ministers were moved to inactive status
- There was no panel member substitution during any of our three meetings.

Significant Projects

Like other UUA committees, the MFC has a lot of projects and regular work on its agendas. These projects would not move forward or would the regular work get addressed if not for the leadership, numerous hours, and dedication put forth by working group chairs and all the working group and executive committee members. For this, we are deeply grateful.

The most significant project of the MFC has been the massive revision of the “MFC Competency Document” and the associated revision of the reading list. This project was started 3 years ago under the leadership of the Rev. Wayne Arnason. The UUA and the MFC is indebted to Wayne and the members of his MFC for starting and advancing the majority of this project. The current members of the MFC were tasked with putting the final touches on this significant project and moving it to implementation.

The competency document with its integrated revised reading list were finalized and approved at the April 2016 meeting. Anyone who becomes a ministerial aspirant with the MFC after March 1, 2017, will be expected to use and be held accountable to the new competencies. However, at least one of the candidates

who is scheduling an interview for this fall has asked if they can begin using the new competencies document.

It should be noted that the competency document revision project has created a ripple effect within the MFC systems; numerous forms for evaluation and renewals will need to be updated so they align with the new competencies. This is additional work that falls to the working groups and the executive committee.

Another significant project for the MFC was responding to an important and complex set of requests from the UUA Board Working Group on Congregational Boundaries. Specifically, the MFC was asked to implement new rule changes and best practices for working with complainants. The rule changes and adoption of best practices will make the MFC process more equitable and responsive to the needs of complainants. The MFC greatly appreciated the support, encouragement, and technical suggestions provided by the UUA Board Working Group on Congregational Boundaries. Without their assistance and partnership this project would have been much more difficult to complete.

Moving Forward

As the MFC moves forward we are faced with a number of opportunities and challenges. Perhaps, the most important is how the MFC must work to stay relevant and effective at providing important ministerial credentialing services in an ever-changing environment. It has become eminently clear that we must not only continue this committee's good work around understanding equity, race, and gender issues; but we must turn this critical lens on our own systems, values, and processes. We must ask ourselves how the MFC positively and effectively address issues of equity, race, and gender; and how our systems may perpetuate oppression and inequity.

Over the past year the MFC has had some help with this work, beginning with Rev. Howard Dana's orientation last September. The MFC also benefited from a training and discussion lead by the Rev. Debra Haffner, founder and past president of the Religious Institute, to help us better understand sexual health and clergy sexual misconduct. Lee Elizabeth Vorderer from the First Parish of Bedford, also led a training about how to interview candidates with disabilities.

The MFC is committed to learning and its continuing education strategies. Additionally, the MFC is working on developing its own internal and external accountability systems. Internally, the Process Working Group of the MFC has begun the process of developing systems and tools for implementing the best practice of evaluating committee members prior to being asked to renew for a new term of service. The goal is to hold committee members accountable and provide helpful feedback.

Externally, after the internal committee evaluations systems are put into place the committee will begin working to develop systems that gather regular feedback and suggestion from the various constituencies the MFC serves. The primary and priority constituency are the ministerial candidates and those ministers being

served by the renewal process. Down the road the MFC will consider gathering formal feedback and evaluation from the UUA board and the UUMA.

Many of our candidates and ministers argue that the MFC wields significant influence over the lives of candidates and ministers. It is not enough to say with that, “with significant influence comes significant responsibility.” Accountability, to the people the MFC serves is needed if this committee is going to honestly address issues of equity, race, gender, and the changing needs of the Unitarian Universalist movement.

Closing

With comfort, I speak for all members of the MFC when I say; it is a great privilege and a deeply humbling experience to serve on this committee. The idea and concept of our work is at times very uplifting, and sometimes exceedingly daunting. This work carries a significant spiritual weight and the potential impact is ever present. However, the daunting scope and weight of this work is manageable because of the strength, wisdom, and profound compassion each individual committee member brings to the work.
