Ministerial Fellowship Committee Orientation for Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Aspirants and Candidates

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This presentation includes the following:

1. Introduction to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, known as the MFC
2. Tips for all candidates to help you succeed with your MFC interview in Boston
3. The MFC’s advice for candidates who attend non-UU theological schools
Section 1

Overview of the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC)
Who is the MFC?

- A committee of the UUA Board
- Composed of 14 members (ministers, lay leaders, psychologists, and religious educators)
- Working in panels of 5 to 7 members & 1 candidate liaison
- Assisted by UUA staff from the Ministries and Faith Development Office
- Meeting three times a year in Boston
The MFC has exclusive jurisdiction over ministerial fellowship and makes rules governing ministerial fellowship, subject to the approval of the Board of Trustees. Each congregation has the exclusive right to call and ordain its own minister or ministers, but the UUA (through the MFC) has the exclusive right to admit ministers to, or remove them from, ministerial fellowship with the UUA.
The MFC examines candidates for the ministry, in the course of their academic and professional training to make a determination as to whether those candidates have the basic skills and fitness for ministry to be accepted into preliminary ministerial fellowship and later full fellowship with the UUA.
How we do our work

- The MFC is intentional in our efforts to understand the impact of white supremacy culture upon ministerial formation and the UU fellowshipping processes.

- We are attentive to our own behaviors, and make use of tools such as process observation, continuing education, caucus discussions for white members and for People of Color/Indigenous members.

- We are far from perfect in the way we do our work, and we know this. So we keep working to be and do better.
Requirements for UU Fellowship

- [https://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/becoming](https://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/becoming)
- This website will always have the most current version of the requirements.
- Competencies used by the MFC were developed from “Fulfilling the Call: A Model for Unitarian Universalist Ministry in the 21st Century” (2013). This is a useful resource for you.
What precedes your meeting with the MFC?

► You prepare... discernment, seminary, CPE, internship, etc. in accordance with MFC Requirements
► You submit to us your portfolio – commonly referred to as your “packet”
► We read your packet... yes, we read every word & take notes
► We prepare to meet with you in person. We create questions based upon the seven core competencies and your packet.
What happens in Boston???

Please read the Candidate Liaison reports describing the experience of the MFC from the “inside.” Go to: https://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/mfc/liaisons or search “candidate liaison” on UUA.org.
“Pulling back the curtain” is a fitting metaphor, but instead of discovering a small, balding man operating levers where Oz might have been, I find behind this curtain, a complex, beautiful, and interconnected web of thoughtful humans doing their best to embody and promote the highest aspirations of Unitarian Universalist ministry.

Rev. Eileen Wiviott, Candidate Liaison, September 2017
What do the Candidate Liaisons say?

The MFC wants you to succeed. They want you to be a benefit to others, and to yourself. They take their time, they process, they hear everyone’s voice, they recognize when something is about nerves and when it’s about needing more time to be formed. They want you to succeed.

► Rev. McKinley Sims, Candidate Liaison, December 2018
Advice from the other side

From the Rev. Katie Romano Griffin, Candidate Liaison, March 2019

1) You are being held in care by the MFC through this entire process.
2) Be prepared for your interview; have a completed packet, know yourself and your edges, and have a fully developed UU identity.
Advice from the other side

3) Reschedule your interview if you are not ready.
4) Do a packet review with David Pettee as part of your preparation process.
5) Whatever number you leave with, take the advice of the MFC seriously, and act on it. The recommendations come from a thoughtful and loving place.
The meeting with the MFC

- Setting – at UUA office in Boston
- People – MFC & UUA staff
- Timeframe – we schedule appointment times but sometimes we run behind
- Decisions & Feedback – we deliver our decision and feedback verbally after your interview and also in writing
- Follow-up – David Pettee is available later for questions
Section 2

Tips for MFC Success for all UU Candidates
Preparing for the MFC: tips for ALL candidates

- Study the seven competencies that the MFC has set for preliminary fellowship. Be familiar enough with the competencies that you can keep up with your activities, tracking when they occur, rather than having to recreate it all when it’s time to put together your packet.

- Use your Biographical essay and other essays to introduce yourself to the MFC
  - What have you learned about yourself from your career assessment?
  - What was it about your faith upbringing that led you to UUism?
  - How is the experience of ministerial development (CPE, career assessment, internship) helping make you a better minister?
Tips for success in Boston...

- In the competency essays, DON'T just state that you are competent in the area with statements like "I believe pastoral care is the heart of ministry and I am a good pastoral care provider." Instead, pay attention to the prompt for the narrative which asks "How have you integrated knowledge and practice in this competency area? Please include your growing edges."

- Please DON’T change the format of the Competencies document. This is very annoying to the committee!
Don’t wait until the last minute to do the MFC required reading! Let the reading help strengthen your UU identity development.

- Make a plan to read the relevant books while you are taking classes related to the UU topics.
- Incorporate the UU readings when doing papers for your classes.
- Ponder how the perspectives reflected in the readings are the same or different from what you’ve learned in your seminary classes.
The day of your interview...

► When you preach, DO try to imagine your MFC panel as a small congregation. Like any congregation, the members of the MFC respect sermons that are courageous and inspirational. We encourage you to not preach a sermon that simply repeats what you’ve written about in your packet.

► When you’re answering the questions posed by the MFC members, DO reveal your true self, which may require revealing your own vulnerability at times.
The final STRATEGY for success for all candidates?

Remember that it's better to seek permission than to have to ask for forgiveness.

When in doubt, contact the MFC.
Rev. David Pettee: (617) 948-6402
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Section 3

Advice for Candidates who attend non-UU theological schools
MFC Advice for students attending Non-UU Seminaries

In this section of the presentation, we share suggestions and advice gathered from several MFC members: Dr. Don Brunnquell, Rev. Jackie Clement, Rev. Shawn Newton, Dr. Joetta Prost, Rev. Qiyamah Rahman, Rev. Maddie Sifantus, Rev. Greg Ward, as well as Rev. David Pettee, UUA Ministerial Credentialing Director.
MFC Advice for non-UU seminary students

- UU identity is one of the core factors that MFC panels look for, and one of the factors that sometimes leads to a second MFC visit.

- The MFC has seen many candidates from Non-UU seminaries and with Non-UU backgrounds who have been successful candidates and wonderful ministers within our movement, so don't be afraid of the issue. In fact, we encourage you to embrace it.

- The MFC expects to see evidence of a sufficient knowledge base in UU history, polity, worship, etc. No one can remember everything, but don’t be the person who doesn’t know who Emerson was!
Become a UU Culture Carrier!

- Candidates need to be able to demonstrate to the MFC that although they matriculated through a non UU seminary, there is demonstrable evidence that they are grounded in UU culture.

- Rev. David Pettee says our ministers must be “UU Culture Carriers.”
The culture of non-UU seminaries is different from that of MLTS & SKSM.

- What’s discussed
- How it is discussed

Everyday casual conversations are different at your non-UU Seminary than at a UU seminary. This is partly because UU-centered issues that take place within our UUA orbit (topics such as 'changes in the UUMA' or 'that thing the Moderator said' or 'the 5 big things Anita just learned from her application process to internship sites' or 'what kind of grant money is available through the Dept. of Ministry', etc.) are far less like to come up in a non-UU seminary context.
Some “CULTURE” Differences

- It's hard - unless you are in constant conversation with multiple cohorts simultaneously - to know how your perspective, your motives, your bias, your assumptions, etc. are shifting. Like any ability to judge movement, it requires AT LEAST two reference points. And at least one of them should be deeply tethered to Unitarian Universalism.

- Geographic differences that exist within UUism may be difficult to learn in your setting. For example, UU parishes in the Northeast are different from those in the Pacific West.
When swimming in a Christian stream...

- You are provided the opportunity to unpack Christian baggage and be better prepared to help other UUs do so as well.
- You can learn language and context that will help you be more effective in the work of community organizing and interfaith engagement.
- It’s good prep for times when you may be the only UU minister in town!
Here’s a good goal:

Explore what it means to be authentically UU in your seminary context while avoiding an oppositional attitude to things that don't align with your own theology or understanding.

Allow these experiences to refine your own perspective and help you better articulate what matters most to you.
But as you work on this goal, remember:

- Having a range of experiences over time in UU settings is as important, perhaps even more important, than the achievement of an "intellectual," "academic," or "declared" identity.
More good advice:

- You must use a broad array of information sources to maintain a full grasp of the ongoing evolution of our faith and the next relevant trends and issues as they are emerging.

- The UU World, UUA.org, the Worship Web, district and regional meetings, emails from the president of the UUMA or the president of the UUA are simply not enough to get a full grasp of the evolution of our faith and the next relevant trends and issues as they are emerging. Explore ways to have additional connections... a study group with other UU candidates, MFN, COIC, DRUUMM, ARE, BLUU, TRUUST, SCM, etc.
Important reminders:

- Developing a deep understanding of our UU history includes knowing how it applies to current practice. MFC history questions have been known to ask this...

- Our UU identity is based in part on putting our values into practice; don't overlook the importance of social justice actions in strengthening your UU identity.
In general...

- No reference from your home congregation’s minister...? MFC may wonder what this means, especially if you are relatively new to UUism.
- It’s good to include UUs when selecting the two reference persons that are yours to choose.
ESSENTIAL STRATEGIES for non-UU seminary students

1. Join the UUMA and the MFN!
2. Develop an active UU life with other UU professionals & seminarians. These colleagues will help sustain you throughout your career… through thick and thin.
3. Active involvement at a UU congregation and/or CLF is essential.
4. Take advantage of opportunities to “do” social justice in a UU context.
5. Do lots of supply preaching in lots of different UU congregations, to help you learn the similarities and differences among our UU congregations.
6. Choose field placements and internships carefully, with an eye toward how they will strengthen your UU identity.
More STRATEGIES

7. Invite UU ministers in the area to do workshops at your seminary.
8. Have UU worship services at your seminary.
9. Attending several General Assemblies is important.
10. While at GA or at other times, take UU courses, giving yourself exposure to UU faculty and UU students.
11. Attend district and regional meetings, and UUMA gatherings.
12. For those planning to do entrepreneurial ministry or other community ministry, consider joining the Society of Community Ministers (SCM). Affiliating with a congregation to learn why affiliation supports community ministers.
STRATEGIES to strengthen UU Identity

13. Set forth on a quest of talking with lots of UUs about how they each see their UU identity; there is no single UU identity, but many identities branching off from shared roots and visions.

14. Write a plan titled something like: “My UU Identity and What I Will Do to Understand and Develop It.” Ask your MFN vocational advisor to help you. Share it with your internship supervisor. Discuss it with your seminary advisor.
You don’t have to be the best minister right now. Be you, the minister who is in formation, not the one who has it all figured out. It’s way more impressive to see someone who can reflect and reintegrate in the moment than to see a dazzling conversationalist that can extrovert their way out of a paper bag. Ministry is partly using your voice, but it is a lot of using your experience to point the way for others. Acknowledge. Reflect. Grow.

Rev. McKinley Sims, Candidate Liaison, December 2018
Blessings as you prepare to become a Unitarian Universalist Minister.