

## **Report of the Basic Questions about Credentialing Task Force to the April 2012 UUA Board Meeting**

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### Summary

In the fall of 2011, the Committee on Committees, well burdened by the tremendous number of appointments it makes to credentialing bodies, began to wonder out loud if there were not some way of protecting the Association's interests in ministerial credentialing other than having trustees hand make appointments, pasted together from countless hours of reference phone calls, sweat and tears. In October of 2011, the Committee brought to the UUA Board a proposed process for looking at this question further. The immediate charge to BQACTF from the October board meeting was to seek answers to some specific questions and, to seek responses to some questions from key stakeholders (identified then as the UUMA, the DPA, UU Identity Theological Schools, current theological students, and recently fellowshiped ministers. The BQACTE presented these findings to the January Board Meeting, along with a historical background to professional and ministerial credentialing and a comparative look at how the process is handled in other religious traditions practicing congregational polity. The board evidencing no apparent need for additional fact finding or opinion seeking at that meeting, we are now prepared to share our findings and make our recommendations.

### Findings

We believe that transferring responsibility for appointments to ministerial credentialing bodies from board to staff not only does not impair the ability of the association to protect its interests, but that indeed, it represents a better way to serve them. We have been discussing all the way along the key differences between "mere" credentialing and the offering of Ministerial Fellowship. The association's highest interests in the latter—specifically that fellowshiping reflect a congregationalist emphasis on the importance of an empowered laity that helps to form the defining shape of Unitarian Universalist ministry-- seems well protected by the extant bylaws requiring the balance of laity and clergy on the committees. Moreover, it seems like the Association's interests in having appointments made that reflect a diversity of persons and experiences would be protected by existing Executive Limitations.

In the course of this process we have heard only one concern about transferring the responsibility for appointments to staff. That concern was that as the MFC has the ability to take action against individuals, the board should remain more directly connected through the appointment process. We respectfully disagree, believing that having the staff do the appointments, with the board serving a monitoring function, the fairness of such a serious responsibility is actually better guarded. The Committee on Committees has repeatedly expressed their own concern that they, as a volunteer body, are not best equipped to do the careful vetting these positions deserve. Moreover, in the case of these committees, it is often necessary to discuss extremely sensitive information about applicants, and it is helpful to have a wider context of knowledge about individuals as well as of the functions and process of the committees themselves than the volunteer Committee necessarily holds or can quickly acquire. We believe a professional staff making appointments will have both a better context for making decisions, and can more readily practice appropriate and well boundried ways of both soliciting and handling personal information. Of course the board will need to have adequate mechanisms for monitoring both the making of appointments, as well as the performance in general.

## Recommendations

1. That the Board recommend to GA 2013 the necessary bylaws changes that would allow for the responsibility of making appointments to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and its subcommittees to fall to the administration.
2. That we immediately request that administration vet and recommend slates of candidates for final board approval to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and its subcommittees until such a time as the bylaws are changed.
3. That the Board develops a process by which it can determine how it would like to best monitor not only the work of the MFC and its subcommittees but of all other committee that are currently board appointed. We submit that not only is this necessary in our policy governance environment, but that the premise that the board has had adequate reporting on these committee's work by virtue of having make appointments or listened to the impressions of individual liaisons is fundamentally flawed. Rather than make specific policy recommendations regarding the MFC, then, we feel that the governance issues involving this whole cluster of committees is best considered together.