
Ministerial Fellowship Committee Annual Report to the General Assembly

Jesse King – May 2017

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 past year has been focused on the implementation of the new competencies, facilitating the transition of committee members, and work addressing several issues related to ministerial credentialing and conduct. The committee's work and the recent events related to UUA hiring decisions caused this committee, and its members, to reflect on how the MFC serves to maintain systems of white supremacy, racism, and oppression.

Implementation of New Competencies and Reading List

The implementation of the revised competencies and reading list is the result of the work started four years ago under the inspired leadership of the Rev. Wayne Arnason. The new competency document was approved in April 2016 and the official implementation date was set as March 1, 2017. Moving forward from the March 1, 2017 deadline, all individuals who become ministerial aspirants are expected to use, and will be held accountable to, the new competencies.

All the candidates seen by the MFC over the last year were eligible to use the old competencies. However, 40% of the candidates appearing before the MFC during our last three meetings chose to use the new competencies. Credit for this substantial percentage was attributed to good communication by the UUA staff that began early last year. The communication effort was assisted by Starr King School for Ministry and Meadville Lombard Theological School as they began encouraging the use of the new competencies with candidates headed to the MFC.

The impact of having candidates using the two different competencies was significant. As with any organizational transition that requires two systems to be in place at the same time, users (committee members) are required to be flexible and knowledgeable with both systems. Committee members were required to read additional materials, adjust questions, and evaluate candidates using two different competency forms and two different reading lists. It also resulted in the increased panel preparation time prior to interviews and occasionally longer discernment discussion after interviews.

At each of the committee's three meetings, time was set aside to talk about implementation and to debrief the experience of using the new competencies. It is expected that the percentage of candidates using the new competencies will

rise over the next few years. Because some individuals who became aspirants prior to March 2017 may delay their interviews, we expect to continue to see individuals using the old competencies for a few more years. The committee's skill and ability to navigate between both competencies will also increase over time.

In a continuing effort to develop the committee's understanding and capacity to address issues of clergy sexual misconduct, a full-day of training was added to the April 2017 meeting. The MFC was privileged to have Rev. Dr. Marie M. Fortune and the Faith Trust Institute provided this extremely valuable educational experience. The committee explored the history, dynamics, and complexity of clergy sexual misconduct, along with specific strategies for addressing issues that will inevitably come before this committee. The data and history provided at this training was a sobering reminder that, without exception, all religious denominations face the challenge of clergy sexual misconduct. Until the world and our societies at large fully address this issue, clergy sexual misconduct in our movement will likely mirror the extent that it exists across the country. The training reinforced the need for increased education and training of clergy and congregations. Ultimately, the training challenged our Faith and this movement to be authentically accountable to our guiding principles.

Transitions

Since the last annual report, the MFC held three meetings: two in 2016, one in September and one in December, and the third in April of 2017.

At the September 2016 meeting the MFC welcomed new committee members Rev. Dr. Kristen Harper, UU Church of Barnstable, MA, and Dr. Donald Burnnquell, LP PhD, from Saint Paul, MN. Both individuals brought to our committee wisdom, expertise, and a rich history of experience with Unitarian Universalism.

At the April 2017 meeting the committee honored the service and gifts of Rev. Marge Corletti and Rev. Karen Stoyanoff. These two individuals reached their term limits for service on the MFC. The wisdom, grace, compassion, and thoughtfulness Marge and Karen brought to our committee will be dearly missed by all. As with those who served before them, please join us in expressing a profound sense of gratitude for Marge's and Karen's leadership and dedication to the MFC and our movement.

Prior to the September of 2016 meeting Dr. Joetta Prost and Rev. Greg Ward were kind enough to accept positions on the executive committee. Additionally, in April 2017, Nick Alan agreed to chair the Process Working Group, a position vacated by Rev. Marge Corletti

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 following data provides a glimpse of the meeting activity:

- 60 of candidates were interviewed in the past year
- 51 were granted preliminary fellowship with or without minor contingencies
- 9 of candidates were making progress towards ministry and were asked to return to the MFC
- 25 of candidates came from the two Unitarian Universalist identity seminaries, 7 from Starr King School for the Ministry and 18 from Meadville Lombard Theological School
- Of the candidates interviewed, individuals self-identified in the following categories:
 - 45 as women
 - 15 as men
 - 7 as People of Color
 - 7 as LGBTQ
 - 2 as People with Disabilities
- 48 minister completed their first renewals
- 57 ministers completed their second renewals
- 50 ministers were granted final fellowship
- 10 ministers were moved to inactive status
- There were two panel member substitution during the past year, both occurred during the April 2017 MFC meeting.
 - Dr. P.D. Wadler, served a substitute for the psychologist Dr. Don Brunnquell.
 - Rev. Sarah Lammert served as substitute for Rev. Kristen Harper

Moving Forward

The coming year will provide this committee with several opportunities and challenges. The MFC faces a backlog of aspirants seeking interviews. As it stands, December 2018 is the earliest opportunity that a ministerial candidate can schedule an interview. To address this situation, The MFC is preparing to add one additional interview panel to the September 2017 meeting and one to the December 2017 meeting. This will provide 20 additional interviews opportunities to the schedule. This is an efficient and low cost strategy that is the equivalent of adding one full MFC meeting to next year's schedule.

The most significant opportunity and challenge facing the MFC will be the future of the committee structure and evolution of credentialing. The weighty events

and experience of the Unitarian Universalist Association over the past couple of months forced a greater awareness of our movement's history; and of systems that perpetuate inequity, structural white supremacy, and how the distribution of power is intimately intertwined with privilege. If the UUA board of trustees, staff leadership, and the incoming president all follow through on their commitments to address equity and systems of white supremacy in our movement; then the reform of the credentialing process and this committee is inevitable. The MFC is product of our history and its systems and practices desperately need to be thoroughly scrutinized with an equity and social justice lens. This will not be easy or comfortable work and the impact will be far reaching. This overdue critical appraisal of the credentialing process and the work of the MFC will impact multiple constituencies, including and not limited to, our congregations, the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, the UUA, seminaries, individual ministers, and those considering, or on the journey toward, the ministry.

It is way too early to speculate on what the MFC will look like in the future. However, it is eminently clear that business as usual will not serve our faith and this movement as it adapts to our rapidly changing world.

Closing

With confidence, I can share that every member of the MFC is deeply committed to our faith and is humbled by the importance of the work of this committee. We will continue to diligently work to serve this faith and not shy away from the mandates for equity and attending to the needs of the future. The compassion, talent, and commitment brought to MFC by my colleagues is an immeasurable gift to our faith and this movement.
