

December 2004 Statement from the MFC

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee re-affirms its belief that mandating identification with “categories” of ministry at preliminary fellowship is problematic. Our experience is that requiring such identification when applying for preliminary fellowship is not a necessary component of ministerial formation, and does not reflect the ministries that many candidates ultimately choose. Our observation of the search, settlement, and employment process is that congregations, clergy employers, and ministers no longer find the category identities as useful as they once were in helping them decide what kind of minister they need or want to be. The MFC’s practice has been to expect all candidates for preliminary fellowship to prepare themselves for basic competency in all the arts and skills of ministry.

The MFC believes that it is not necessary to amend the UUA by-laws to begin to address some of the problems with categories that we regularly experience in our work. The by-laws do not mandate that the Ministerial Fellowship Committee grant preliminary fellowship in a category of ministry. Therefore, we are planning to eliminate for candidates seeing the MFC in September 05 the check-box requirement to “declare a category” on the application for preliminary fellowship.

Starting in September 2005, the MFC will grant preliminary fellowship in UU ministry, not in a category of ministry. This decision will allow the category in which the minister submits three preliminary fellowship renewals to determine the category of ministry in which the minister receives final fellowship. Ministers will continue to receive final fellowship in a category of ministry.

We will recommend to the UUA Board certain MFC rule changes related to competencies, internships, and mentorships that follow from this decision. We are also reviewing our policies and procedures with this change in mind. We hope that these changes will help address certain of the inequities among the categories of ministry within the MFC’s authority. We urge the UUA Board and the UUMA to engage in conversations about inequities that are beyond our mission and role.

The MFC wishes to state clearly and firmly that we are still in a conversation with the UUMA, the Board, and the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff Group (MPL) about whether any further changes in the fellowshiping process should take place. We are acting now to stop requiring a category declaration at the time of preliminary fellowship because it reflects our current practice during interviews of expecting basic competence in all the arts and skills of ministry.

In making this decision, the MFC is moving ahead by planning to implement some important changes that are within our authority and that will address some of the problems that brought about the proposal to re-design preliminary fellowship. We are also seeking to be responsive to feedback we have received about the idea of eliminating categories altogether and replacing them with a specialties recognition process separated from final fellowship. We continue to be interested in elements of our proposal to redesign fellowship as we implement the decision recommended above.

Full Committee Approved
(13-1-0)