

Report to the Board of Trustees, UUA  
Religious Education Credentialing Committee  
Rev. Will Saunders, Member of the Board and RECC Liaison  
December, 2007

At its October, 2007 meeting, I presented a brief and informal to the Board of Trustees on my first meeting with the Religious Education Credentialing Committee as its new Board Liaison. I said at that time that a more formal report would be included in the December Board packet. This is that report, though perhaps a little less formal than originally intended.

As I reported in October, I reported my delight at the significance and the quality of work of the RECC. Imagine the need to develop a credentialing process for persons who have entered the field of religious education in as many ways as one can imagine, often without specialized training, sometimes without bachelor's degrees, with gobs of enthusiasm and commitment and suffering from association with the dubious tradition of the "downstairs church." With a desire to professionalize the position of Religious Educator, the RECC set out to identify competencies, develop standards and establish criteria for awarding the status of credentialed Religious Educator at three levels: Associate level, Credentialed level and Masters level. My summary in October was that they have done a salutary job with a huge task. I went to my first meeting with some uncertainty and returned home feel buoyed by the work of this important committee.

The RECC framed its initial task by reference to the other principal credentialing body of the UUA, the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC). However, the MFC had the advantage of being able to rely on outside agencies to assure initial competence: a degree from an accredited theological school, a Clinical Pastoral Education program, a required supervised internship and so on. The need to establish equivalencies and competencies for Religious Educators was critical and the RECC set itself to the task. While an observer may note that a relatively small number of Religious Educators have been credentialed by the RECC, it is important to note that a large amount of the committee's time has been spent in designing the process. I believe that that task is now largely complete. I refer to the UUA website for details on the current credentialing process.

Let me now offer some observations on the meeting of the committee in October, 2007 in San Antonio.

- Five persons were interviewed: one for the Masters level and four for the Credentialed level. One Masters level was awarded, three Credentialed level and one Associate level.
- The Committee reads and discusses a book at each meeting chosen to address AR/AO/MC issues. The book for October was *Unequal Childhoods*. I felt that this strategy was an effective way of meeting the Board's requirement re: AR/AO/MC.
- The Committee has completed an annotated reading and resource list. While the entire committee participated in its development, I believe that Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland shouldered the bulk of the work. I invite you to look it over;

and trust that it is online. All of us would make changes in the list to reflect our concerns and priorities, but I invite you to just look over the degree to which this work is a resource for more than religious educators. In the course of the meeting, the suggestion was made that the RECC might be offered as a resource to the MFC. I enjoyed the irony of that suggestion.

- With such varied backgrounds and experience, the issue of “equivalencies” is a serious and frequent issue for the committee to address. I can report that the decisions of the committee in this respect are not made lightly but with due consideration and thought. There is even an equivalency subcommittee! And related is what to require of a candidates “portfolio.” At this point, they are huge and probably a bit burdensome to the candidates. The Committee is looking at the whole issue of what to require in a candidates’ portfolio.
- With “life experience” and on the job-training being prominent in the credentialing process, it is apparent to me that mentoring plays an unusually significant role in the credentialing process. If there were one area where further thought and improvement is needed, I would identify this as that area. I have suggested that this area needs to be examined for improvement. It would be helpful to consider questions such as: What training do mentors have? Who selects a mentor for a candidate? What standards are in place for the mentors and how are the mentors monitored? Should the pool for mentors include parish ministers, lay people? How much initiative, how directive, should a mentor take or be with a mentee? To whom should the mentor be accountable (currently mentors are accountable to LREDA, not the RECC)?
- Another area of concern for me is the relationship of the parish minister to the religious educator. Though this has been an area of conflict, it seems to me that we are likely to develop a more highly qualified and committed cadre of religious educators if we can find a way to involve parish ministers in the credentialing process. This may be a sticky wicket, but hey.....
- The RECC proposed a rule change re: background checks and it is my understanding that it will be vetted through the Association Working Group en route to the Board. Look for it in January, as the Board must approve the RECC’s rules, as it does the MFC’s rules.

In sum, I was delighted to be involved with the RECC and pleased with the work they have done and the work they have set for themselves. The tradition that religious education is a basement activity is being frontally challenged by this committee. For this Board member, it was very encouraging.

Respectfully,

Rev. Will Saunders, Board Liaison