

Requirements for Ministerial Fellowshipping in the UUA

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Processes for Ministerial Fellowship in the UUA

Enter into Applicant Status with the UUA Ministerial Credentialing Office

Contact the UUA Ministerial Credentialing Office with your intention to enter into the fellowship process

[Click here for contact information for the office](http://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/becoming/index.shtml)

Advice: Do this ASAP

Enter into Aspirant Status with the UUA Ministerial Credentialing Office

A person in aspirant status has submitted the following forms to the Ministerial Credentialing Office:

1. [Initial Inquiry Form](http://surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=p4%2f24CkRQPLjnnNRKLFKbbZxhapKZGZCvI1MFrEg%2bHQ%3d&) *All Regional Sub-Committee on Candidacy(RSCC) and Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) forms may be found in the Appendix of the Requirements for Ministry booklet.*
2. [Interview Form (RSCC-2)](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/credentialing/interview.doc) (Word) ([PDF](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/credentialing/interview.pdf))
3. Essay on ministerial aspirations and relevant biography (1-2 pages) in which you say something about who you are and the ministry you feel called to serve.
4. A signed [Criminal Offense Disclosure/False Representation Statement RSCC-3](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/criminal_disclosure.doc) (Word) ([PDF](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/criminal_disclosure.pdf))
5. A [Transfer/Plural Standing](http://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/becoming/16221.shtml) Form, if applicable. The requirements for clergy seeking transfer or plural standing with the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) are essentially the same as for all other aspirants. Please note that the MFC seeks evidence of a clear demonstration of motivation and commitment to Unitarian Universalism. Clergy seeking transfer or plural standing must also:
	* Sign a consent form allowing for the release of information to certify status of standing in current or prior denomination; ([RSCC-4](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/08_transfer.doc)) (Word) ([PDF](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/08_transfer.pdf))
	* Submit a letter of reference from a ministerial colleague from current or prior denomination;
6. Has been accepted into theological school or other approved program or has graduated.
7. Signed the [Application for Candidate Status/Waiver of Claims/Authorization, RSCC-5](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/credentialing/candidate_app.doc) (Word) ([PDF](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/credentialing/candidate_app.pdf))
8. Completed the [Financial Planning Worksheet, RSCC-6](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/credentialing/fin_planning_worksheet.doc) (Word) ( [PDF](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/credentialing/fin_planning_worksheet.pdf)).

Advice: The RSCCs like to see people not much later than after the equivalent of a year of full time study, and interviews must be scheduled far in advance, so request one early

Enter into Candidate Status with the UUA

1. Completed and released a [career assessment](http://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/becoming/16193.shtml) from an approved center
2. Completed at least one year of theological education
3. Been interviewed and granted candidate status by an Regional Subcommittee on

[Click here for information on interviews with the Regional Subcommittee on Candidacy](http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/committees/rscc/index.shtml)

Enter into Preliminary Fellowship with the UUA

Advice on Preparing for RSCC and MFC Interviews

*We begin with some history of the credentialing/fellowshipping process, in order to illustrate an essential confusion that has caused grief for many, the clarification of which forms the basis of my recommendations.*

There is vast confusion about the dual function of the Ministerial Fellowshipping program of the UUA. While the desired outcome of this process is Ministerial Fellowship for the candidate in question, the process is one of *both* credentialing and fellowshipping; two very distinct and different things.

A credentialing process is one that certifies that the person examined has both a degree of academic practical knowledge to practice a profession that is understand to require a great deal of preparation, and where the malpractice of which is thought to have a significant capacity to harm. Most credentialing processes have their origins in the nineteenth century, when the proliferation of specialized formal education meant that most people were now prepared for vocations by schools, rather than through less formal apprenticeships. This led to some concern that schools may or may not be in close enough touch with the requirements of the practice of the profession, rather than the mere academic study of it. Hence credentialing bodies were formed of actual practitioners, a practice which continues today. Medicine was the first profession to adopt a credentialing process, although part of the history of credentialing is to see this paradigm expanding outwards to an increasing variety of vocations not always previously considered professional.

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee does do the sort of professional assessment that is appropriately labeled “credentialing,” but it also does more, as the name “ministerial fellowship” itself indicates. The MFC also determines whether a person presents as a minister, and a UU minister in particular. Here people become confused. Often, they either imagine that the fellowshipping process is only a credentialing process, or they confuse fellowshipping with ordination, and claim that “the UUA” is stepping outside the boundaries of congregational polity in determining who might be seen as a minister. Of course, in congregational polity, congregations alone have the sacred right to install particular persons as ministers to particular congregations, and to the (almost) rite of ordination.[[1]](#footnote-1) In fact, “the UUA” is an association of congregations, performing those tasks too complex to be well undertaken by single congregations, and the assessment of a person’s *general* suitability for UU ministry has been understood as such a task for a while now, although certainly not forever. Hence all aspects of the Fellowshipping process mandate the inclusion of lay people, and the appointments to these bodies are given to the UUA Board of Trustees precisely for the special protection of the role of congregations and laity in the process.

I fall into this perhaps seemingly arcane polity lecture because I am convinced that **confusion between credentialing and fellowshipping on the part of students and those advising them has been a major contributor to poor outcomes.**  Students preparing for a credentialing exam only tend to cram on facts and rehearse answers to hypothetical content questions. This often actually impairs the students’ ability to present as a UU minister in the room, as someone who is emotionally present and engaged with the other persons in the room, and as someone who might be said to represent the living tradition.

*Common Mistakes in the Fellowshipping Process:*

1. Delaying too long before seeing the Regional Subcommittee on Candidacy. Students feel like they want more time “to get ready.” Meanwhile, the RSCCs understand that their process is to guide students from early on, and give persons good counsel. It confuses/concerns them, then, when students do not make appointments along the recommended time line. You should know that the MFC itself is recommending rule changes (not yet approved but likely to be) that would take away the RSCC’s ability to deny candidacy (they would only approve or delay candidacy) which is intended to take pressure off this interview so that students can approach it more easily.
2. Overuse of coaching and rehearsal. It often does more damage than not, by encouraging students to think only in terms of professional competence and rehearsed responses, not engaged ministerial presence. Also, the vast majority of coaching and mock MFC panels are done by persons who have little no experience or expertise in the process. On the part of ministers, their only experience is often their own MFC interview, often many decades in the past. Meanwhile, lay person panelists, really interested in the process and flattered to be included, can be unreasonably affirming of students. If you chose to do a mock MFC, be sure to select people who are very knowledgeable about the process, and/or people who have seen the MFC themselves not more than five years ago.
3. Be yourself. Sometimes students offer each other advice along the lines of “don’t talk about your passion for x, the committee prefers you to be y.” Don’t do it! You need to be able to speak about yourself, your interests, and your ministry as honestly as possible.
4. Take the Wizard of Oz advice: don’t relate to the committee as if they were the big, scary, green face projected on the screen, instead, be sure you are talking to the people in the room. Relate! Minister!
5. Know your packet thoroughly.
6. Be sure to account for how you have followed up on any and all suggestions that we made to you.

*Special thoughts on MFC preparation from SKSM student Abbey Tennis, and former member of the MFC:*

When we are ministerial students, there is a lot of anxiety in the air about the MFC process. We fear not knowing enough detail, or not being able to recall it under pressure. We distrust the process of our years of preparation being judged by a panel of strangers who have only known us for an hour. We don’t fit the “mold” of “standard UU minister” and we fear they will reject us as too unusual.

 Those fears may be valid (though many students find detail recollection and conformity matter much less to the MFC than we initially think they do). But our preparation for ministry shouldn’t orbit around our anxiety. It shouldn’t even orbit around the standards set by the MFC. Each of us should simply be trying to become the best UU minister we can be. If we do that, the credentialing process will affirm it.

So what are the most important aspects of preparation?

1. Be intentional about your ministerial formation and discernment. Watch your process as your skills and ideas develop. Watch where you have strong gifts and where you feel unformed/unprepared. You are the best evaluator of your growing edges. Judge yourself against the best you – not against anyone else.
2. Get involved in congregational life. Even if you struggle to find a congregation that speaks to you. UU Ministers must know the movement. We must understand the lived experience of UUs, flawed as we all are, in order to lead. Get to know other UU communities too, if you can – youth communities, regional organizations, etc. This goes for people preparing for community ministries as well as parish-based ministries. It is important to know who we are, and how we work.
3. Engage with colleagues. Find other UU ministers, and UU ministers-to-be. Find mentors. Get to know peers. Talk openly with them about your discernment and formation. Make friends. Ask advice. This is important for two key reasons:
	1. Our movement is tiny. We will know these people for our whole careers, and when most of us are out there doing solo ministries in congregations, or community settings, our collegial network is essential for support, trouble-shooting and inspiration.
	2. Mentors can give us excellent advice about our preparation. The more ministers we can go to with questions about how to address our growing edges, or our concerns about the ministry, or our ideas for the faith, the better! They can give us a broader perspective on what ministry looks like, feels like, is, and is not, than we can see from our vantage point as non-clergy participants in UU community. Take every opportunity you can for collegial engagement.
4. Personal, emotional, and spiritual growth is as important as (and arguably much more important than) intellectual growth. We should attend to our emotional/spiritual lives with as much care as we attend to our academic lives.
5. Get in contact with the ministerial credentialing office at the UUA. Right now, the director of that office is David Pettee. Have a conversation with David as early as you can about your process. This is his job – you are not bugging or burdening him. He will give you important information and advice about the steps you need to take to be credentialed, and the timeline for each of the steps (MDiv, aspirant status, Career Assessment, RSCC interview, CPE, Internship, MFC interview, and eventual settlement process if you are interested in parish-based ministry). He can also help you trouble-shoot in the areas your process doesn’t magically line up with the standard process, he can help you find resources to meet your learning needs, and he can help connect you to colleagues or learning opportunities that may be invaluable to you.
6. The MFC process is long and complex. It involves many steps, which often have to be taken in specific order, or on a specific timeline. This process is a general guideline for how to prepare for credentialing, but if pieces of it don’t match your process or timeline, there are always options for making it work for you. Nearly all MFC rules and policies can be waived for people in preparation if there is a good reason. This can help candidates find creative alternatives to standard elements of the process or the normal timeline of the process. The MFC cares about us becoming fully prepared for UU ministry, not that we 100% follow the rules if they don’t work for our life situation. This is another reason to talk to David Pettee 🡪 he can give us thoughts about the type of waivers the MFC may or may not grant us if they are warranted for our situation.
7. Breathe, trust yourself, and connect to your deepest grounding. This call is about service to something larger than ourselves – humanity, all that is holy, the UU movement, the earth. Try not to dwell on anxieties about this process – focus on your vision for how to serve the world.

Specific Advice and Additional Information on Requirements

**CLINICAL PASTORAL EDUCATION**

Our advice for you:

1. Much of what you get out of CPE depends on the quality of the supervisor. Make sure you pick an established program with a supervisor with a good reputation. Ask around about the supervisor, and make sure you feel comfortable with them before choosing a program.
2. Although the UUA will sometimes approve CPEs without ACPE accredidation, we recommend against this. These programs can be uneven in quality, and can be cancelled on short notice, leaving you without options.
3. Be sure you discuss with your advisor your readiness for CPE. CPE is an intense and rich learning opportunity; you want to do this in the right place in your ministerial formation for maximum benefit.
4. Be sure to take your CPE supervisor’s feedback seriously, and discuss it with your advisor and other mentors.

This is what the UUA says:

Candidates are required to complete a basic unit of certified Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). (A directory of certified CPE programs is available from the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc., at [www.acpe.edu](http://www.acpe.edu).)For many aspiring clergy, CPE represents the first experience of being considered a minister, both by the candidate and by others. It is strongly recommended that you complete CPE prior to meeting with the MFC.Most candidates find CPE to be a rewarding, though rigorous, learning experience. A significant part of the work occurs in a small group of peers, led by the supervisor, during which issues of self-awareness are addressed. The knowledge gained in this way can be critical to competence in ministry, which depends heavily on the quality of one's character and personal relations.

Most CPE settings are at hospitals, although alternate sites may be available. All CPE programs require a minimum of 400 hours of work on-site. About half of that time will be spent doing the work of ministry, the other half reflecting on that work one-on-one or in the group. CPE can be completed in a 10-12 week intensive program or in an extended unit. The MFC is willing to consider a CPE Equivalency when a candidate brings relevant experience and references. Please contact the Ministerial Credentialing Director for further information.

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**AREAS OF ACADEMIC COMPETENCE**

Advice:

When it comes time to prepare for the MFC Interview, you will need to document how you’ve satisfied each of these areas. We strongly advise that you develop a system of noting all the way along how the books you read, the workshops you attend, the coursework you take, the congregational and community experiences you have, fit into each of these categories. Periodically review the categories to make sure you aren’t neglecting any.

What the UUA Says:

The MFC expects that each candidate will have achieved a satisfactory level of competence in specified areas. Students are encouraged to work closely with their seminary in planning their courses of study so that the following areas can be covered through course work, independent study, reading, seminars, workshops or other experiences. The following is a description of the areas of competence that the MFC feels each candidate should cover in the course of their preparation. **How these areas are covered is left to the candidate and to the seminary.** The Committee requires that each candidate prepare a written statement of competency. Course work with *brief* course descriptions can be included in the statement as well as *brief* descriptions of the readings, seminars, workshops, or life experience being cited as pertinent to the specific areas of competence.

THEOLOGY: Each candidate is expected to have competency in theological studies, both historical and contemporary, with the ability to articulate and discuss his/her own theology.

CHURCH HISTORY: Candidates are expected to be familiar with the major events, themes, controversies and theological issues in the history of the Christian Church, with particular attention to the development of Unitarianism and Universalism.

HEBREW AND CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES: All candidates are required to have the equivalent of one graduate level course in critical analysis of the Hebrew Scriptures, and one graduate level course in critical analysis of Christian Scriptures. An additional course in each area is strongly recommended.

WORLD RELIGIONS: Candidates are expected to have graduate level knowledge in two areas: general comparative studies of major world religion traditions, and the in-depth study of one specific religious tradition other than Unitarian Universalism.

SOCIAL THEORY/SOCIAL ETHICS: Candidates are expected to be knowledgeable about social theory (issues of ethics and justice), to understand the religious issues involved, to have responses to the issues, and to have a practical understanding of the dynamics of social change.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT/FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION/MINISTRY WITH YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS: Candidates are expected to be knowledgeable about theories and research in human development and how these theories relate to issues such as aging, adolescence, parenting, and death. In addition, candidates should be familiar with issues, programs, and resources for ministry with youth and young adults.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST HISTORY AND POLITY: Candidates should be able to demonstrate graduate level knowledge of issues, themes, theological motifs, sources and literature of Unitarian and Universalist history, and be able to describe and critique institutional history, present organization and issues, with an emphasis on building an anti-racist, multi-cultural movement.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HISTORY, THEORY, METHOD, AND PRACTICE: Candidates should have an understanding of several current philosophies of educational learning theories, teaching methods (including methods of teacher training,) and the history and philosophy of Unitarian Universalist religious education. Candidates are expected to be knowledgeable about several current philosophical and methodological trends in UU religious education, and be familiar with at least one Unitarian Universalist religious education curriculum at each age level. Candidates should be able to discuss the theological and educational assumptions and methodologies each religious education curriculum uses.

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 **AREAS OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE**

Advice:

When it comes time to prepare for the MFC Interview, you will need to document how you’ve satisfied each of these areas. We strongly advise that you develop a system of noting all the way along how the books you read, the workshops you attend, the congregational and community experiences you have, fit into each of these categories . Periodically review the categories to make sure you aren’t neglecting any.

What the UUA Says:

The MFC expects that each candidate will have achieved a satisfactory level of competence in specified areas. Students are encouraged to work closely with their seminary in planning their courses of study so that the following areas can be covered through course work, independent study, reading, seminars, workshops or other experiences. The following is a description of the areas of competence that the MFC feels each candidate should cover in the course of their preparation. **How these areas are covered is left to the candidate and to the seminary.** The Committee requires that each candidate prepare a written statement of competency. Course work with *brief* course descriptions can be included in the statement as well as *brief* descriptions of the readings, seminars, workshops, or life experience being cited as pertinent to the specific areas of competence.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS/ UUMA GUIDELINES: A thorough knowledge of the UUMA Guidelines, paying special attention to professional ethics, is expected.

WORSHIP, PREACHING, MUSIC AESTHETICS: Candidates are expected to know the theory and art of worship, preaching and rites of passage, and have experience in conducting religious ceremonies.

PASTORAL CARE AND COUNSELING: Candidates should be familiar with theories, techniques and issues related to pastoral counseling, and be able to demonstrate ability in pastoral counseling. One unit of Clinical Pastoral Education is required.

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION: Candidates are expected to have good skills in working with committees and boards, and in training, motivating, and sustaining volunteers. A working knowledge of group dynamics, interpersonal communication, theories of ministry and family systems theory is expected.

ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT: Candidates are expected to have familiarity with and basic competence in methods and theories of administration and fundraising. Work in this area should be a combination of academic and experiential.

ANTI-RACISM, ANTI-OPPRESSION AND MULTICULTURALISM: Candidates are expected to be conversant with concepts of anti-racism and to demonstrate a commitment to anti-racism and diversity in our Association.

SEXUAL HEALTH, SEXUAL BOUNDARIES, SEXUAL JUSTICE: Candidates are expected to be knowledgeable about sexuality issues in ministry, including sexual education, LGBTQI issues, sexuality concerns of adults and adolescents for pastoral care, and public witness. Candidates are expected to demonstrate a commitment to sexual justice in our Association and in society. One sexual harassment prevention learning experience is required.

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**INTERNSHIPS**

Our Advice:

It is wise to begin thinking about possible internships as soon as possible. Consult with Rev. Kurt Kuhlwald. Check out the Internship Clearing House at the UUA by [clicking](http://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/becoming/internships/index.shtml) here.

Cultivate relationships with UU Ministers you admire. Sometimes it is possible to make private arrangements through personal connections for internships with congregations or organizations that don’t necessarily have one already established.

Make sure you know as much about prospective supervisors as you can before committing to an internship; be sure your styles are compatible. Talk to former interns of particular congregations and organizations.

What the UUA says:

All interns must have scheduled an interview with an RSCC prior to the commencement of their internships. MFC Policy 3, C. 9 states that candidates for the UU ministry have “Agreed in writing to defer accepting any ministerial position other than internships and student ministries unless approved by the Ministerial Credentialing Director. Violation of this policy shall render the candidate ineligible for an interview with the Ministerial Fellowship Committee or Ministerial Fellowship for four years from the commencement of the position.”

All candidates are required to satisfactorily complete a full-time or part time supervised internship. Full-time internships must be for at least nine months. Part-time internships typically extend over a total of 18 months at a minimum of 15 hours per week. Supervision is to be provided by a UU minister in final Fellowship. Equivalent experience, e.g. fieldwork placements or supervised ministries may be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is acceptable to conflate an academic field education requirement with the UUA internship requirement. Internships play a crucial role in ministerial formation.

All interns, regardless of their setting, will be expected by the MFC to demonstrate a basic competence for ministry in the areas listed here. These descriptions of ministerial competencies are not meant to be exclusive, nor does the MFC expect that all interns will incorporate every task into a Learning/Service Agreement. Interns in community based settings may find that not all of these are immediately applicable to their work; however, it is expected that they develop these competencies in their relationship with a UU congregation.

**A**. The MFC expects a candidate applying for Preliminary Fellowship to demonstrate their abilities in the full range of ministerial competencies, defined jointly by the MFC and the UUMA as Pastoral Work, Prophetic Outreach, Teaching, Practical Arts and Worship. An internship shall therefore be designed to enhance existing and needed skills within these broad competencies defined as follows:

**1. Pastoral Work** refers to direct service to persons, families, or groups within a congregation or community based setting. This work includes: counseling with regard to life issues, relationships, and spiritual growth with the minister cognizant of her/his abilities and limitations; small group facilitation and leadership; care-giving to individuals and groups and tending to the institution’s spirit.

**2. Prophetic Outreach** refers to those aspects of ministry that extend the Unitarian Universalist commitment to justice, peace, democratic process, and interdependence beyond the congregational or community based setting. This work includes: public witness or the intern’s personal involvement with regard to community or world issues; social advocacy, the intern’s engagement with anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multi-cultural initiatives and promotion of institutional inclusivity and commitment to Unitarian Universalist values.

**3. Teaching** refers to creating, leading and facilitating educational programs. This work includes: educational program development; fostering theological thoughtfulness and depth in individuals and the congregation or community based setting, as appropriate and advancing Unitarian Universalism, its heritage, practices, and ideals.

**4. Practical Arts** refer to the nuts and bolts of everyday congregational or institutional life. This work includes: program administration and development; denominational participation; working with governing boards, committees and volunteers; working with peer and support staff, and the direct provision of service/s.

**5. Worship** refers to all aspects of corporate worship. This work includes: the art of preaching and leading worship; worship service development and leadership for all ages; the intern’s personal spiritual life, and administering rites of passage (children’s dedications, coming of age ceremonies, weddings, memorial, and funeral services).

**B**. Lay leaders must evaluate and affirm the ministerial roles of a candidate during an internship. The internship supervision shall therefore include a lay committee of five or more persons.

**C**. An internship is not only about development of skills. The internship shall therefore be designed to enhance the

intern’s ability to reflect on the theological and ethical bases from which these skills arise.

**D**. An internship is an opportunity to grow into the identity and role of a minister. Therefore the internship shall include evaluations from the intern, supervising minister, and intern committee, which are shared and which shall accompany other application documents to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee. Such evaluations shall emphasize reflections on areas of change and growth during the internship. Interns are required to develop a written Learning/Service Agreement with their supervisors and lay committees before, or at the beginning of, any internship.

Whatever the setting, direct weekly supervision is required. For community based internships, it is not required that the intern’s supervisor be a Unitarian Universalist minister in final fellowship. However, the intern must have a Unitarian Universalist minister in final fellowship available for consultation and reflection and serve as a member of the intern committee. The MFC discourages congregations from offering internships during the minister’s sabbatical year.

The MFC expects that supervision will occur on-site and discourages off-site supervision. Those interns who seek off-site supervision must consult in advance with the Ministerial Credentialing Director, who in some circumstances, may involve the MFC Candidacy Working Group to authorize the arrangement. Off-site supervision guidelines include:

a. that the off-site supervisor and intern meet preferably face to face weekly;

b. that the off-site supervisor only be supervising one intern at a time;

c. that the off-site supervisor must be in full and final fellowship;

d. that the off-site supervisor preferably not be a District Staff member;

e. that the off-site supervisor and intern be in consultation with the Ministerial Credentialing Director in design of the Learning/Service Agreement

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**REQUIRED READING**

Advice:

[Click here for the list of reading required for ministerial fellowship](http://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/becoming/16224.shtml). You’ll note that this links also contains links to the requirements in electronic format where possible.

Make yourself familiar with the list early in your seminary career, so that whenever possible, you can include these works in with your regular coursework as possible (for example, when working on a special project, it would be great to include titles from the MFC list where appropriate).

Many students also find it helpful to review the titles together in study groups before they are scheduled to meet with the MFC.

Prof. Susan Ritchie helped develop this list, and is happy to be a resource especially if you get stuck on: *why* would *this* be on the list?

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**UNDERSTANDING OF UU CONGREGATIONAL LIFE**

Our association is an association of congregations. Congregations are our most basic and sacred unit of both governance and practical religion. Note the Fellowship requires two years of active involvement; two years of passive membership is not adequate. You’ll want to get involved in one congregation in great depth. But especially if you are new to UU, you’ll want to look for ways you can demonstrate you’ve sought out ways to experience different sorts of congregations. Because of the independence in our polity, our congregations can be quite different from one another; understanding that is absolutely key to ministry and to understanding Unitarian Universalism.

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**MOTIVATION FOR MINISTRY**

Be capable of clearly describing your call to ministry; members of the MFC expresses concerns frequently about persons who seem to be “backing into” ministry. Be able to clearly describe the difference between the role of a minister and lay leader.

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**CONGREGATIONAL SPONSORSHIP**

Here’s what the UUA says:

Upon being granted candidate status, candidates are required to obtain sponsorship by a UU congregation.

 *What is the purpose of this requirement?*

The purpose of this requirement is to ensure familiarity on the part of aspiring ministers with UU congregational life, and encourage congregations to take a responsible role in the recruitment, preparation and assessment of our future ministers. Our congregations, our ministries and our religious movement all stand to gain if we can work together creatively to identify and support potential leaders.

 *When does sponsorship occur?*

Since the Regional Sub-Committees on Candidacy make the first official decision regarding a person’s fitness for ministry using input from a number of different sources, a request for sponsorship from a congregation occurs after an aspirant have been granted candidate status by an RSCC.

 *Who should decide who is or isn't sponsored?*

In most instances, sponsorship will be decided by a vote of the congregation or its representative body, such as the Board of Trustees. If the congregation has a minister, he or she may have a recommendation, but it is not the minister's role to make the final decision.

 *Is some kind of documentation required?*

Yes. Documentation of congregational sponsorship should be provided using the following form at [www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialcredentialing/22461.shtml](http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialcredentialing/22461.shtml) or the form in the Appendix.

 *What happens if a congregation chooses not to sponsor a candidate?*

The Ministerial Credentialing Office would appreciate being contacted in the event a congregation chooses not to sponsor a candidate so appropriate steps can be taken to address the concerns regarding why this decision was made.

 *What is being said with the decision to sponsor a candidate?*

At the most basic level, congregational sponsorship indicates confidence in the candidate's potential and suitability for UU ministry. The MFC regards sponsorship as evidence that the candidate is actively committed to the Purposes and Principles of the UUA and the institutions which uphold them. A congregation is not indicating that the candidate is presently ready for ministry when the congregation commits to sponsorship. The final decision to grant fellowship to a candidate is made by the MFC after careful consideration of written materials, evaluations and a personal interview.

 *What are the other requirements for UU ministry?*

The general qualifications, as stated by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee, are these:

“All candidates must have satisfactorily completed all educational and skill training programs and demonstrates the qualities, skills and aptitude required for Unitarian Universalist ministry as determined by the MFC. Those qualifications and requirements include, but are not limited to, the following: satisfactory completion of an approved clinical pastoral education (CPE) program and an internship (as described in Rule 12), or the equivalent; have completed the required reading; have undergone an approved career assessment program; be able to demonstrate an understanding of and experience with UU congregational life based on at least two years active involvement or equivalent; must demonstrate a strong motivation for our ministry; must be sponsored by a member society; and must demonstrate a balanced and healthy personality, a capacity for self-understanding, a concern for others, and ministerial leadership skills. The Committee will further require that the candidate be well informed on the history and development of Unitarianism and Universalism, familiar with the Bylaws of the Unitarian Universalist Association, and fully committed to the purpose, objectives and guidelines of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers’ Association. A candidate for the ministry shall also have a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a theological school approved by the Committee or have had an equivalent educational experience. Any exceptions to these qualifications must be approved by the MFC.”

In addition to the general qualifications for ministerial fellowship, there are many specific requirements for candidates. Go to: [www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialcredentialing/index.shtml](http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialcredentialing/index.shtml)

*Doesn't this requirement have the potential for creating an uncomfortable situation in the congregation if the congregation is not enthusiastic about sponsoring a candidate, especially if the candidate is a long-term member, big contributor, etc.?*

Yes. This is an important concern which needs to be dealt with carefully. It is especially important, however, not to back away from the challenge of providing the person with honest feedback. Chances are if a congregation has severe reservations about a person's potential for ministry, the candidate will not be well-served in the long run if falsely encouraged.

The MFC does not recommend that a congregation risk conflict over sponsorship. In expressing reservations to a candidate, it is important to try to stress concern for a candidate’s well-being and success in employing their unique gifts, which might not necessarily be for ministry. If a congregation comes to an impasse or don't know what to do, please call the Ministerial Credentialing Director.

In many instances, a congregation will be asked for sponsorship by a person who is away at school or simply moved away for other reasons. If the person is reasonably well known within the congregation, it is certainly appropriate to consider sponsorship. A congregation may want to recognize a candidate’s aspirations through, for example, newsletter articles, announcements, and invitations to participate in congregational activities when the candidate is in the area. A congregation could invite a candidate to write a newsletter article sharing with the congregation some of the excitement of their journey.

If the congregation has a minister, their relationship with a candidate is important. The minister may be a mentor, role model, teacher and spiritual guide of considerable influence. The minister may also have mixed feelings about the candidate or the role that person is playing within the congregation. In any case, it is important to be sensitive to the possibilities and pitfalls inherent in the relationship and include the minister when developing policies regarding congregational response to candidates.

 *Who's* *supposed to be providing all this support?*

Again, congregations will respond to this opportunity in a variety of ways. Some will be able to offer little support at all and will simply deal with requests for sponsorship at the board level on a case by case basis. If this is apt to be the scenario in your congregation, it is still important to have a policy in place which will guide your response to possible inquiries. For example: Who decides? What criteria are important? Will you want to interview the candidate? What happens if someone tries to block sponsorship? What if the board and the minister disagree?

If there is more interest and energy within a congregation for working with candidates, the board might, for example, recruit a subcommittee to develop policies, explore possibilities and relate to candidates and their needs for support.

 *In what ways might a congregation support a candidate?*

Depending on their interests, resources, and the needs of the candidate, congregations will choose to support the people they sponsor in a variety of ways. Nothing in particular is required.

One of the major concerns for theological school students is their high level of debt; financial assistance can sometimes make the critical difference between staying in school and dropping out. A congregation and candidate may want to work together to raise money in any number of ways, including special fund-raisers and help with locating grant money or with direct backing from generous parishioners. People who are looking for opportunities to donate money tend to believe that contributing to the education of our future leaders is a good and worthwhile investment. Some congregations contribute to the cost of the

career assessment program. It is important for persons aspiring to the ministry to do this as early as possible in their preparation. Congregational support and encouragement to do career assessment will benefit the individual and our ministry as a whole. The cost of the program can be considerable.

Valuable support can be offered in less tangible ways as well. Candidates may benefit from opportunities to preach or lead other forms of worship. They may need experience working with committees and the financial aspects of running a church. They might be asked to be leaders in the religious education program, or organize a social action project.

Candidates could be encouraged (and supported financially) to participate in UUA district and continental events. A particularly worthwhile opportunity, especially for people who are relatively new to Unitarian Universalism and/or concerns of the larger Association, is attendance at the UUA General Assembly. Consider having the candidate seek delegate status from your congregation.

*With a seminary nearby, congregations are liable to be deluged by requests for sponsorship. What should a congregation do when the candidate is not well known?*

If a congregation is near a theological school attended by many UU students, it will be particularly important to develop policies regarding sponsorship as soon as possible. Most congregations in this circumstance already have developed certain understandings about how to welcome, integrate and support ministerial students and value their presence. The challenge may simply be to become more intentional about a sponsoring relationship.

If a candidate not well known asks for sponsorship, it's perfectly acceptable to expect that person to become involved in the life of the congregation for a period of time before considering sponsorship. Some congregations ask for a reference from a UU minister or other mutually acceptable person who knows the candidate to get more background.

All candidates are expected to have been minimally been actively involved with a UU congregation for at least two years before interviewing with the MFC. For people who became UU's during seminary or for ministers who want to transfer from another denomination, this requirement may seem like a difficult obstacle. Despite this challenge, the MFC firmly believes that those aspiring to professional leadership positions in our Association need to have grounding in, and understanding of, UU congregational life. Congregational sponsorship may not guarantee this understanding, but it is meant to encourage, facilitate and underscore its importance.

 *Is sponsorship like having a ministerial intern?*

No. Congregational sponsorship and ministerial internships are very different. An intern has contracted with the congregation and the minister for supervision as a learner for an agreed upon length of time. The intern is acting in a professional ministerial capacity, even though ministerial credentials have not yet been granted. Interns are evaluated and held accountable in a structured way that is not appropriate for someone the congregation sponsors. A sponsored candidate who is not an intern will participate as a layperson, not a minister. If a congregation has an intern or field education student, it will be important for both minister and congregation to be clear about the distinction so the intern's position of authority is not jeopardized or confused.

 *Does a person need to be a member for congregational sponsorship?*

While it is important for a candidate to indicate their institutional commitment by membership in a UU congregation *somewhere,* it is not necessary for them to be members of the sponsoring congregation. It would be important to consider this issue on an individual basis. Some candidates seek sponsorship from their internship sites and this is permissible.

 *This seems like a big responsibility. What's in it for a congregation?*

What's in it for congregations is the opportunity to play a pivotal role in promoting responsible, well-prepared leaders for our religious communities and Unitarian Universalism in general. The MFC’s experience with sponsorship is that it is not burdensome. In fact, both congregations and candidates have expressed pride and enthusiasm about the opportunity to claim one another. For more information about sponsorship or a person requesting sponsorship, please contact the Ministerial Credentialing Office.

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**PERSONAL TRAITS**

From the UUA: “must demonstrate a balanced and healthy personality, a capacity for self-understanding, a concern for others”

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**UNDERSTANDING OF UU HISTORY**

You will need to be able to show that you can place yourself and your ministry within the context of our living tradition. Be able to easily pull up historical figures and theologians you admire, and explain why. Have a good sense of the overall arching development of history, but don’t obsess on names and dates. Good news: the MFC has decided to ask fewer “stand alone” content questions, and more that ask people to explain how they might use historical knowledge in their ministry (in otherwords, less of: When was the Cambridge Platform written? And more: what would you say to a church member about the meaning of covenant and where that came from?). For an overview, it can be helpful to periodically review the brief outline of North American UU history in the front of David Robinson’s book*, The Unitarians and the Universalists*.

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**UUA BYLAWS**

OK! We get it. Not everyone finds reading associational bylaws riveting. But you really need to do it. Nothing is more off putting than when folks aspiring to UU Ministry don’t get the basics about how the association *works.* And the Ministerial Fellowship Committee is likely to ask you some very basic polity questions (ex: how is the UUA Board elected? Who is the Moderator? What does the Moderator do?).

[Click here for a complete copy of the UUA Bylaws](http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/bylaws/index.shtml)

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**UU MINISTERS ASSOCIATION**

You can’t know enough about it—read the guidelines thoroughly, and join your local UUMA Chapter the very minute you are eligible.

<http://www.uuma.org/>

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**MASTERS OF DIVINITY**

Chill. You’ve got it covered. You chose Starr King School for the Ministry.

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1. “almost” because ordination has taken on many of the tropes of a sacrament in our practice, and yet the tradition itself is non-sacerdotal. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)