

Adoption of the Unified Fitness Review (UFR) Process

1. OVERVIEW OF THE UFR PROCESS:

- Association amends bylaws to incorporate the Unified Fitness Review (UFR) process for Fitness Reviews.
- Fitness concerns are first presented to the Association COM as “blind” documents.
- The Association COM decides whether this is a fitness issue. If it is a fitness issue, it is referred to the UFR Committee. Association COM agrees in advance to accept the finding of the UFRC as its own.
- UFRC conducts Fitness Review according to 2018 Manual on Ministry (MOM).
- UFRC communicates outcome to all covenantal partners involved in the Fitness Review.
- If there is a growth plan, UFRC monitors compliance and progress and determines when growth plan is completed.
- Appeals are governed by the terms in 2018 MOM:
 - Only the minister under review can appeal.
 - Only the process (not the outcome) can be appealed.
 - The executive committee of the Association holding the minister’s standing acts as the board of appeal.
 - The board of appeal can either affirm the process or require some or all portions of the fitness review to be redone.

2. THE 2018 UCC MANUAL ON MINISTRY GUIDELINES FOR FITNESS REVIEWS:

Refer to pages 122-137 of MOM (attached) - this will be helpful to have available for reference.

3. ASSOCIATION BYLAWS OR GOVERNING DOCUMENT

A copy of the governing document is attached with proposed amendments.

WINDHAM ASSOCIATION
OF THE ~~CONNECTICUT~~ SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

GOVERNING AGREEMENT

(THIS GOVERNANCE DOCUMENT ACTS AS BY-LAWS)

Who we are and how we work together:

The Windham Association of the ~~Connecticut Conference~~ **Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ (SNEUCC)** is currently comprised of the following United Church of Christ (UCC) churches: Abington Congregational Church; Federated Church of Christ of Brooklyn; First Congregational Church of Canterbury; Central Village Congregational Church; Westfield Congregational Church of Danielson; East Woodstock Congregational Church; Hampton Congregational Church; First Church of Christ in Mansfield, Congregational; First Congregational Church of Plainfield; The Congregational Church of Putnam; Scotland Congregational Church; First Congregational Church of South Killingly; Storrs Congregational Church; Storrs Korean Church; Congregational Church of Thompson; First Congregational Church of Willimantic; Church of the Good Shepherd of West Woodstock; and First Congregational Church of Woodstock; delegates of these congregations and authorized ministers in good standing in this Association.

Members come together to strengthen our common witness to the mission of Jesus Christ, to affirm our collective responsibility to make our faith alive in the world, and to serve our member church communities as specified in this document.

Our Covenant: In keeping with the traditions of the United Church of Christ we, the member churches and authorized ministers in the Windham Association, relate to each other in a covenantal manner, promising each other to seek God's will and to be faithful to one another in the work we do. Each church is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of all members of the Association and to listen, hear, and carefully consider the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, the members of the Association seek to walk together in all God's ways.

Our purpose and role:

We work together to be in active fellowship with the ~~Connecticut~~ **Southern New England** Conference and the General Synod of the UCC, and to be concerned with the welfare of all local UCC churches within our boundaries. The role of the Windham Association is specifically to:

- Determine, confer, and certify standing of both local churches and authorized ministers in the UCC within the boundaries of this Association.
- Conduct other business that aligns with our mission of supporting clergy and churches.

Governance

For the purposes of electing officers and members of the Windham Association Council or gathering as an ecclesiastical council each member church in good standing is represented by its minister(s) and up to two other delegates. In addition to those serving as representatives of member churches,

voting members also include all authorized ministers who hold standing in this Association.

The administration of the Windham Association shall be accomplished by the Windham Association Council.

The Council shall meet regularly, at least six times annually. The Council shall include a Moderator, Vice Moderator, Registrar, Treasurer, and five Members at Large.

- Moderator: calls for and facilitates meetings, sets meeting agendas, serves as the chief point of contact for Association business, and provides an annual report to delegates and clergy of this Association. The Vice Moderator shall perform these duties in the Moderator's absence.
- Registrar: takes meeting minutes, records the results of consensus decisions and votes, and reports to the ~~Connecticut~~ Southern New England Conference concerning installations, ordinations, commissions, licenses, or Members in Discernment, as well as persons or churches removed from membership. The registrar also transfers standing for authorized ministers in good standing.
- Treasurer: creates and oversees the budget, reports about finances at each meeting, collects dues, and pays bills.

Officers and Members at Large will be elected for a three-year term. The Registrar and the Treasurer have no term limit. All others are limited to two consecutive terms.

The Council will appoint three members to a nominating committee. The nominating committee will meet to determine the leadership needs of the Council, recruit new Council members based on those leadership needs, nominate new members, and orient them to the work of the Council.

A quorum, defined as the presence of more than one-half of the members, must be present for any decision made by either consensus or voting.

Decisions may also be made through any means by which a quorum of members can hear each other (such as through conference call) or by votes submitted in writing, in print or electronically.

Council Responsibilities

The Council will act as the Association's Committee on Ministry. We understand that our responsibilities are to:

- Consider the standing of local churches; review and recommend churches to the Association for membership or dismissal.
- Review and transfer standing of ordained ministers, accept candidates for Member In Discernment standing, and approve candidates for ~~licensed or commissioned ministry~~ Lay Ministerial Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner status.
- Review and recommend candidates for Ordained Ministerial Standing and Installation to an Ecclesiastical Council.
- Review and recommend candidates for Installation or Privilege of Call to an Ecclesiastical Council or serve as that Council.

- Grant authorized ministers' leaves of absence when requested and accept the written resignation of such ministers.
- ~~Adjudicate~~ **Review** any allegations of pastoral misconduct by an authorized minister and, ~~if person is found unfit, remove standing.~~ **if the Council deems it appropriate, refer further exploration to a Unified Fitness Review (UFR) by the Conference UFR Committee (UFRC) and will accept the outcome of the UFRC as its own. The UFRC will follow the process for conducting a Fitness Review as described in the current UCC Manual on Ministry. The UFRC will also follow any additional processes agreed upon by all the participating Associations, so long as those processes do not conflict with the Manual on Ministry.**
- **Appoint one member to the Conference Unified Fitness Review Committee. The appointee must have been a member of an Association's Committee on Ministry within the last 6 years. The term of service for each member will be three years. The appointee may be renewed for up to two more terms of service. Attention to the importance of balancing gender, clergy, lay and the needed skills and experience on the UFRC shall be considered in making or renewing its appointments.**
- Review and remove standing without prejudice of an authorized minister who is not retired and is no longer serving the church in the capacity for which he or she has standing.
- Grant reinstatement of standing, if appropriate, to authorized ministers who have had their standing removed and have reapplied for standing.
- Ensure that all decisions about standing are guided by the **most current edition of the UCC Manual on Ministry.**
- Act as mediator or counselor in local churches when invited to do so by the minister or the church leadership.
- Provide opportunities for continuing education and collegiality.

In addition to our responsibilities to our members, the Association has governance and administrative responsibilities. These may include: creating and monitoring an annual budget, filling vacancies in volunteer officer positions, setting the agenda for meetings, reviewing and modifying Association guiding agreements and procedures, creating committees and task forces, engaging members to complete specific tasks, and communicating the decisions and actions of the Council to delegates and clergy of the Association.

Changes to this Agreement

From time to time the membership may wish to add more or less specificity to this document or to change it substantially. Changes may be made annually, presented in writing, and agreed to by the membership.

From time to time, members may decide to use a provision(s) contained in the bylaws of the ~~Connecticut~~ **Southern New England** Conference, especially in cases in which members feel the need for specific procedural guidance not contained in this agreement. When the ~~Connecticut~~ **Southern New England** Conference bylaws are used, the section used can be specified in the notes of an Association meeting.

Proposed Changes for January 27, 2021 ~~Adopted May 15, 2013~~

Section 2:6 Accountability and Support

“Fitness” is used holistically to describe the demonstration of integrity and ethics throughout a person’s personal and professional behavior.

A Committee on Ministry may conduct a Fitness Review on:

- *persons with Ordained Ministerial Standing, including those on a Leave of Absence or with Exempt Standing;*
- *persons who hold Lay Ministerial Standing;*
- *persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing serving in UCC contexts;*
- *persons with Dual Standing.*

Conference Ministers are subject to a slightly different Fitness Review process; see Section 3. Concerns about a Conference Minister’s behavior and/or fitness for ministry should be directed to the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.

ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS: FITNESS REVIEW

A Fitness Review is a serious proceeding that involves a reassessment of a person’s overall fitness for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. For this reason, it is important that a Fitness Review be thorough so that a Committee on Ministry can be fully informed in its discernment and decision in response to an identified concern. Such careful thoroughness is intended to ensure faithfulness and integrity in the deliberation of persons’ ministerial standing, and effective representation of the United Church of Christ through those to whom it grants ministerial standing. In matters of Fitness Reviews, the Committee acts in and on behalf of the entire United Church of Christ.

The process of a Fitness Review balances appropriate confidentiality with transparency. Confidentiality requires that the Committee on Ministry share information only with those who need to know at the time they need to know, and that some details of a Fitness Review are not shared broadly. Confidentiality does not guarantee anonymity for those involved in the Fitness Review. For the sake of transparency and accountability in covenant, all parties in the Fitness Review process—the minister in question, the ministry setting, the one(s) who raised the concern, the Committee on Ministry, the Response Team members, and Association/Conference staff—are expected to act within the scope of the Fitness Review process according to their roles and responsibilities.⁸³ Transparency also requires that the Committee on Ministry shares information about Fitness Review outcomes with its Association (for example, through reports to the Association Annual Meeting), with other Associations

⁸³ See Section 3 for resources on the Fitness Review process and the roles of various judicatory partners.

through the ministerial file if ministerial standing is transferred for the person at a later date (only after the Fitness Review with any related obligations has reached its conclusion), and through the UCC Data Hub. Above all, confidentiality and transparency are necessary to convey the Committee on Ministry's sense of responsibility to a process that is thorough and fair so that its outcomes are trusted.

Before initiating a Fitness Review, a Committee on Ministry should ensure that the Fitness Review process is not used to address concerns unrelated to a person's fitness for ministerial standing.

The following roles and responsibilities related to a Fitness Review should be clearly identified and followed:

- The recommended role of a **Conference/Association staff member** is that of coordinating—and assigning, as needed—the various roles within a Fitness Review process and encouraging timeliness in the process.
- The **person raising a concern** is encouraged to participate in the Fitness Review process appropriately. The person raising a concern is invited to be interviewed by the Response Team. Refusal to do so, while it may impede the gathering of information, does not affect the Committee's responsibility to fully investigate the concern raised. If circumstances arise where there is no clearly identified person raising a concern, the Committee on Ministry can still proceed with a Fitness Review, gathering information as appropriate. A written complaint is not required to initiate a Fitness Review. Aside from the person who originally raises the concern, additional persons with information related to the concerns may be interviewed by the Response Team.
- The person whose ongoing fitness for ministerial standing is under review—identified as the **minister in question**—is obligated to participate in the oversight processes of the

Organizational structures for Committee on Ministry vary throughout the United Church of Christ. Many Conferences utilize Unified Fitness Review Committees that adjudicate on behalf of each of the Association Committees on Ministry within their Conference. See section 3 for resources on Unified Fitness Review Committees.

For the purposes of oversight processes, the terms "minister" and "minister in question" are used to indicate all those who hold any form of ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ.

United Church of Christ with the Committee on Ministry. Failure to participate in the Fitness Review process (such as the failure to sign or abide by the confidentiality notice, or the refusal to be interviewed by the Response Team or the Committee on Ministry) is a failure to participate in the covenantal relationships of ministerial standing as required by the UCC Ministerial Code and is grounds for termination of standing at the conclusion of the Fitness Review.

- The **Committee on Ministry**, on behalf of the Association, is the body that receives a fitness concern, receives and discerns over the report of the Response Team, meets with the minister in question as well as the person raising the concern, determines the appropriate outcome of the Fitness Review, monitors programs of growth (if appropriate), and determines ministerial standing in light of the Fitness Review outcome.
- The **Conference or Association staff member** works with the Committee on Ministry to identify, train, and support a pool of **Response Team** members—persons not currently serving on the Committee on Ministry—who can ably serve in two roles:
 - ▼ an **Interview Team**, usually composed of two or three persons who interview those with information related to the concern, gather documentation related to the concern (such as letters, emails, receipts, photographs, etc.), draft interview summaries for review by those interviewed, and share interview summaries and documentation with the Committee on Ministry;
 - ▼ **Process Guides**, serving as information liaisons from the Committee on Ministry to the person raising the concern, to the minister in question, and to the ministry setting where the minister in question serves (with one Process Guide assigned to each person/party). Process Guides provide information about the Fitness Review

Response Teams are cohorts of persons outside of the Committee on Ministry who are trained to observe and report while reserving judgment.

process as appropriate and answer questions; they may also refer persons/parties to additional resources.

- Although not obligated to do so, the Committee on Ministry may identify spiritual support for the minister in question and the person raising the concern. Those providing spiritual support are not involved in the Fitness Review process; they do not advocate to or meet with the Committee on Ministry on behalf of persons affected by the Fitness Review. Their role is to provide pastoral care and spiritual guidance if such support is not already in place for the minister in question and person raising a concern.
- Although not obligated to do so, the Committee on Ministry may identify a cultural consultant to inform the Committee's understanding and discernment. A cultural consultant is a person who helps to observe differences in cultural norms when those attributes are not already present within the Committee on Ministry. A cultural consultant might take a teaching role to help the Committee consider a person's context—whether the minister in question or the person raising the concern—in order to relieve that person from the work of teaching the Committee.

Once a Fitness Review is underway, the person raising a concern and the minister in question are informed of the process that will be followed. Their pastoral care by persons unrelated to the process is encouraged by the Committee.

If a person chooses to resign standing in order to avoid a Fitness Review process, the process must be suspended. Ministerial standing cannot be reinstated without resuming the incomplete Fitness Review.

1. Information Surfaces

Concerns about the ministerial ethics, behavior, and/or ongoing capacity to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code of a person with

If needed, Committees are encouraged to obtain additional information in order to review the redacted case and/or conduct the Fitness Review, seeking information from secular authorities, cultural consultants, ecumenical judicatory staff, or other sources as necessary. Legal representation of the minister in question, person raising the concern, or other persons interviewed is not permitted in the Fitness Review process.

The initiation of any Fitness Review must be reported in a timely manner to the UCC National Setting. Ministerial Profiles cannot be validated or circulated during the adjudication of a Fitness Review, and ministerial standing cannot be transferred during this time. The National Setting updates Fitness Review information in the UCC Data Hub about the minister in question.

Circumstances in which a Committee on Ministry needs to transfer the adjudication of a Fitness Review include: when multiple Committee members must recuse themselves from the process, and when a Committee member, Conference Minister, or supervising Associate Conference Minister is the subject of the Fitness Review. Unified Fitness Review Committees also need to transfer Fitness Review adjudication in these circumstances. The National Setting supports Committees in such transfers.

standing should be taken seriously and not dismissed without careful consideration and response. While a question about ministerial behavior may surface as the result of a formal complaint, this is not always so. Concerns may be raised and information received through other means, such as social media or news reports or a documented conversation with Conference staff, and the person who raises the concern might or might not have a direct relationship with the minister in question or the ministry setting. Deliberate follow-through enables the Committee to responsibly address the faithfulness and effectiveness of all ministers in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Once a concern is received, the Committee on Ministry chair and an Association or Conference staff person determine whether the information provided is sufficient for the full Committee to decide whether the concern is most appropriately addressed through a Fitness Review or referred to another ecclesial process. This initial assessment is not an investigation or assessment of the concern but rather a clarification of the information and a determination of appropriate next steps. If the concern relates to ministerial fitness, the Committee chair and Association or Conference staff person create a redacted case to take to the Committee.⁸⁴

2. Committee on Ministry Makes Initial Decision(s)

The whole Committee on Ministry receives the redacted case, prayerfully considering whether the identified concern is a matter related to the UCC Ministerial Code and asking: “If this concern is found to be true, does it call into question the person’s fitness for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ?” If *Yes*, the Committee votes to initiate a Fitness Review. If *No*, the Committee determines whether a Situational Support Consultation is appropriate. Once the Committee determines *Yes* or *No*, the identity of the minister about whom the concern was

⁸⁴ Redacted case: A brief summary of the concern that has been raised, excluding (to the extent possible) any identifying details of the person, the ministry setting, or those affected, so that the Committee on Ministry can consider the concern without bias for or against those involved.

raised is revealed to the Committee. This identification allows for Committee on Ministry members to recuse themselves from the Fitness Review if appropriate⁸⁵ and/or for the Committee to transfer adjudication of the Fitness Review as needed. If another Association, Conference, or Unified Fitness Review Committee will conduct the Fitness Review, the Committee on Ministry votes at this time to transfer the process to, and to accept the outcome from, that other body, agreeing not to pursue its own investigation.

In some instances, a Committee on Ministry may choose to suspend the ministerial standing of the person under review, pending the outcome of the Fitness Review. This decision is based on the need of the United Church of Christ (as assessed by the Committee on Ministry) not to have the person in representative servant leadership during the course of the Fitness Review. Separate from the Committee on Ministry's decision, in some instances a ministry setting or employer may choose to put the minister in question on administrative leave until the outcome of the Fitness Review is reached. Administrative leave (or employment termination) is a decision of the ministry setting or employer, not the decision of a Committee on Ministry. (Administrative leave should not be confused with Leave of Absence, which is a type of ministerial standing.)

3. Committee on Ministry Prepares Fitness Review

The Committee on Ministry (or other adjudicating body) reviews the Fitness Review process, including appeals; summarizes the concern by framing it within the UCC Ministerial Code; and recuses any members with conflicts of interest. The Committee identifies Response Team members from within the pool of trained volunteers to serve as Process Guides and Interview Team. The Committee creates an initial list of questions to be asked by the Interview Team and an initial list of persons to be interviewed. The Committee chair and/or Association staff person reviews the

⁸⁵ See the recommended conflict of interest policy in the Committees on Ministry Orientation Booklet in Section 3.

Fitness Review process with the Response Team and provides the Response Team with documentation related to the concern.

The Committee on Ministry chair or Association staff member, in conversation with the assigned Process Guide, contacts the minister in question as soon as possible following the Committee's vote to initiate the Fitness Review. They inform the minister of the Fitness Review process, share the summarized concern, introduce the Process Guide, inquire about the minister's systems for spiritual support, have the minister sign the confidentiality notice,⁸⁶ and answer any questions about the process.

The Committee chair, Association or Conference staff member, and/or Process Guide speaks with the person who raised the concern in order to inform them of the Fitness Review process, to clarify the confidential nature of the process, to have the person sign the confidentiality notice, and to answer any questions about the process.

The Committee chair, Association or Conference staff member, and/or assigned Process Guide contacts the ministry setting's leadership to notify them of the Fitness Review and to request a meeting with the governing body. At the meeting, the summarized concern is shared, the Fitness Review process is explained, and the leadership is supported in determining whether and how the rest of the ministry setting will be notified of the Fitness Review. If the Local Church of membership is different than the ministry setting, the leadership of the Local Church is also informed at this time. The Association or Conference staff member notifies the National Setting's Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Team of the initiated Fitness Review. If the minister in question holds ecclesiastical endorsement, then the UCC Endorsement Office is informed directly once a Fitness Review is initiated.

4. Information Gathering

The Interview Team gathers relevant information about the concern, meeting with the person raising the concern, persons

⁸⁶ See Section 3 for Fitness Review Confidentiality Notice.

from the ministry setting as needed, others whose names emerge in the interview process who may have relevant information, any additional persons identified by the Committee on Ministry, and finally with the minister in question.⁸⁷ The Interview Team makes a detailed summary of each interview, which is shared with the respective interviewee for their clarifications and signature. Public records and other documentation that confirms information from the interviews may also be gathered by the Interview Team.

The minister in question is last to be interviewed and has the opportunity to review (but not retain copies of) the interview summaries in order to respond to the identified concerns.⁸⁸ The Interview Team makes a detailed summary of the interview and shares it with the minister in question for their clarifications and signature. Occasionally during the course of a Fitness Review, patterns of behavior or specific actions contrary to the UCC Ministerial Code surface that may or may not directly relate to the original concern. The Interview Team includes this new information into its process, and the Committee on Ministry considers the information in its discernment and decision-making.

5. Committee on Ministry Deliberation

The Committee on Ministry receives the collected information from the Response Team and considers it prayerfully alongside the UCC Ministerial Code. The Committee meets with the Response Team to clarify details of the interviews as needed and to thank them for their work.

The Committee on Ministry prepares for, schedules, and hosts a deliberation meeting during which both the minister in question and the person raising the concern have a separate opportunity to share their perspectives with the Committee and to address questions. If either party declines to participate in the process,

⁸⁷ Best practices for Interview Teams can be found in Section 3.

⁸⁸ If, in the Interview Team's work, the minister in question or other interviewee identifies previously un-interviewed persons who may have relevant first-hand information, the Interview Team may schedule additional interviews.

the Committee includes this information in their deliberation and continues to move forward in determining the outcome. The Committee prayerfully considers all information. Questions for reflection include: Were the specific concerns found to have merit? Is the minister in question currently fit to hold ministerial standing in and to serve on behalf of the United Church of Christ? What is the rationale for this decision? Based on the Committee's deliberations, what outcome is discerned to be appropriate?

The Committee on Ministry makes its decision regarding the fitness of the minister to continue serving in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ and the capacity of the minister to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code. Fitness Review outcomes are reported to the National Setting's Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Team and noted in the ministerial file.

6. Outcomes

Outcomes of a Fitness Review include:

- *Affirmation of Standing.* The minister's current fitness for ministry is affirmed. This is an appropriate outcome when the specific concerns were unfounded or unsupported by the information available to the Committee, or when the identified concern is not a fitness matter.
- *Admonishment.* The concern is found to have validity and acknowledged by the minister as a mistake; the Committee on Ministry likewise determines that the behavior is not habitual. There is evidence that the minister in question has already made acts of repentance and has taken steps to demonstrate their responsibility for the behavior in question, including measures to avoid similar mistakes in the future. A program of growth is not required, the admonishment is not reported on the UCC Ministerial Profile, and the person's ministerial standing is reaffirmed.

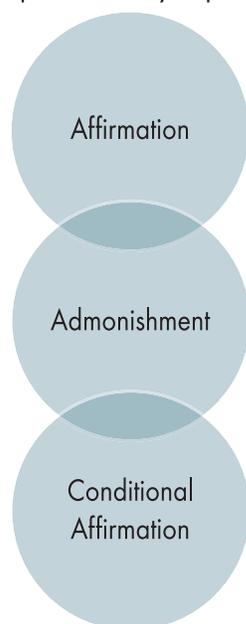
A program of growth should include specific, realistic, and measureable goals that address the identified concern(s). Such goals consist of clear expectations for actions to be taken or ceased, as well as clear expectations for outcomes of those actions, all of which must take place prior to the review and potential reaffirmation of standing. Programs of growth should also include a timeline for review. If a program of growth is not completed to the satisfaction of a Committee on Ministry or according to the timeline, new benchmarks may be set and the reaffirmation of standing may be delayed or termination of standing may be considered. See Section 3 for sample programs of growth.

- *Conditional Affirmation of Standing with Program of Growth.* The concern is found to be true, affecting overall demonstration of one or more aspects of the UCC Ministerial Code. The Committee determines that the person may continue in their ministry but that constructive growth and healing must be undertaken at the same time, to be reassessed by the Committee at a future date. Using the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers alongside the UCC Ministerial Code, the Committee creates a program of growth to address specific concerns. Conditional affirmation must be reported on the person's UCC Ministerial Profile until the program of growth is completed to the satisfaction of the Committee on Ministry. Those with conditional affirmation and a program of growth may circulate a UCC Ministerial Profile with disclosure of a current program of growth, and may transfer standing, including the transfer of the program of growth after clear communication between the sending and receiving Associations' Committees on Ministry. Following the successful completion of a program of growth, the Committee reviews and may reaffirm the minister's standing. Once standing has been reaffirmed, conditional affirmation no longer is required to be disclosed on the Ministerial Profile.
- *Censure with Program of Growth.* The concern is found to have validity, affecting overall demonstration of one or more aspects of the UCC Ministerial Code. The Committee determines that the person may continue in ministry but that the actions were severe enough or habitual enough to warrant a permanent record on their UCC Ministerial Profile. In addition, using the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers alongside the UCC Ministerial Code, the Committee creates a program of growth to address specific concerns raised in the Fitness Review. A censure does not permit the person to circulate

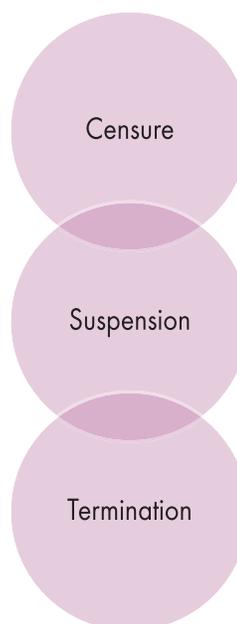
a ministerial profile until the Committee is satisfied with the completion of the program of growth. Censure must be reported on a UCC Ministerial Profile in perpetuity. Following the completion of a program of growth, the Committee reviews and may reaffirm the person's standing or may determine that further action is required.

- *Suspension of Standing with Program of Growth.* The concern is found to have validity, and the Committee determines that the minister is not currently fit for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. A program of growth is created and agreed upon, with reassessment by the Committee at a future date. For the duration of the suspension, the minister may not represent themselves as serving in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and the minister may not circulate a UCC Ministerial Profile. Suspension must be reported on the UCC Ministerial Profile in perpetuity. Following the completion of a program of growth, the Committee may reaffirm standing, continue suspension with a revised program of growth, or terminate standing, as determined by the Committee on Ministry's reassessment of the minister's fitness to maintain ministerial standing.
- *Termination.* The concern is found to have validity, and the Committee on Ministry determines that the person is not currently and is unlikely to become fit for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Standing is terminated, and the person may no longer represent themselves as a minister of the United Church of Christ. If reinstatement of standing is sought at a later date, the person must return to the Committee on Ministry in the Association where standing was terminated, at which time the Fitness Review and its outcome are factors in a Committee's reconsideration of ministerial standing.

Outcomes not permanently reported



Outcomes permanently reported on the UCC Ministerial Profile



7. Alternate Conclusions to a Fitness Review

In addition to the above decisions, there are two other ways in which a Fitness Review might conclude:

- *Referral to a Situational Support Consultation.* The minister's current fitness for ministry is affirmed, and the concern is referred to a Situational Support Consultation. This outcome is appropriate when, after examining the gathered information, the Committee on Ministry finds that the concern does not call into question a minister's capacity to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code but identifies a concern that can be addressed more appropriately through a Situational Support Consultation.
- *Resignation of Standing.* At any time in a Fitness Review, the minister in question may resign their ministerial standing, at which point the Fitness Review process cannot finish. The resignation is received by the Committee on Ministry, and it is recorded in the UCC Data Hub (with

A person who has resigned their ministerial standing or had their standing terminated by a Committee on Ministry cannot represent themselves as a minister of the United Church of Christ.

After the determination of an outcome by a Committee on Ministry, the minister and those who are affected by the behavior of a minister may desire to engage together in relational (but not ecclesial) processes that seek reconciliation and restoration. Such processes are the choice of those parties and not to be construed or represented as ecclesial actions of the Committee on Ministry on behalf of its Association. These processes should not interfere with the Committee on Ministry's work in a Fitness Review and—if engaged by some or all parties—are to be held only after an outcome is determined. See Section 3 for suggested resources related to restorative processes.

bias), noting the incomplete Fitness Review. Prior to any consideration of reinstatement of standing at a later date, the incomplete Fitness Review must be addressed to the Association where the person resigned standing. Reinstatement of standing requires the completion of the Fitness Review process.

8. Decision Communicated

The Committee on Ministry conveys its decision first to the minister in question, preferably in person by a representative of the Committee. The representative provides information as needed about the decision, any program of growth, and appeal process; this same information is provided to the minister in question in writing for their signature. When a program of growth is required, a copy of the growth plan is provided and a signature is required from the minister in question. The refusal of the minister to sign these documents is considered a refusal to participate in the covenantal relationships of ministerial standing, and the Committee may choose to terminate standing based on this refusal.

The Committee on Ministry then conveys the outcome of the Fitness Review to all covenantal partners, including the ministry setting (with which a copy of the growth plan is shared, if there is one), the Local Church of membership, the person raising the concern, the Association, the Conference, and the National Setting. The appropriate release of Fitness Review information is not hindered by the refusal of a minister under review to sign documents, as the process and documentation are the property of the United Church of Christ. The documentation of the Fitness Review itself is held in a packet within the ministerial file, with a summary report attached to the packet.

9. Programs of Growth

When a Committee on Ministry discerns that a program of growth is an appropriate part of a Fitness Review outcome, the Committee

considers: What changes need to be demonstrated by the person to the Committee before they can be reaffirmed to ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ? Are there specific actions that need to be taken by the person to right wrongs (such as written or verbal apologies, repayment of financial debt, etc.)? What timeline is anticipated for assessing the program of growth? What tools, resources, or contacts will enable the minister to achieve the growth necessary to faithfully and effectively minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ?

The program of growth should have specific goals that facilitate the person's self-knowledge and help the minister understand the conditions that gave rise to misconduct. A comprehensive program of growth takes into account the vulnerability of the minister as well as the harm done to others, providing opportunities as appropriate for a minister to take responsibility for their actions and to develop preventative strategies against similar actions in the future. Effective programs of growth are holistic and hopeful, believing that persons can rededicate themselves to effective ministry alongside healthy life and relationship choices. Psychological assessment is typically included in programs of growth, as well as therapeutic work and/or spiritual direction. Costs for such services are typically borne by the minister.

10. Fitness Review Appeals⁸⁹

An appeal may be requested by the minister in question within thirty days of the Committee on Ministry informing the minister of the Fitness Review outcome. Appeals may be based only on the Committee on Ministry's faithfulness in executing the Fitness Review process; outcomes are not appealable. The Fitness Review is the only ecclesial process of Committees on Ministry that may be appealed.

If the request for an appeal is granted, following its bylaws and the UCC Manual on Ministry, an Association holds a meeting

⁸⁹ Section 3 includes recommendations for a Fitness Review Appeal Process and Media Guidelines during a Fitness Review.

of its appeal body, giving opportunity for both the minister under review and the Committee to address the procedures used in (and purported failures of) the Fitness Review process. The purpose of the meeting of the appeal body is not to re-examine the information but to determine whether the process used by the Committee was consistent with the Fitness Review process adopted by the Association. If the process was consistent, the appeal is denied. If the process was not consistent, the appeal is sustained, and the appeal body directs the Committee on Ministry to review and reenact as appropriate the action or step in the Fitness Review process that has been found to be inconsistent, following the adopted process of the Association. Information obtained by reviewing or completing the identified actions or steps may impact the discernment and final outcome decided by the Committee.

11. Reinstatement of Standing

Following a resignation or termination of ministerial standing, a person may seek reinstatement of standing through the Committee on Ministry of the Association where standing ended. If the Committee on Ministry chooses to consider the request, it convenes for a time of discernment and considers the following:

- the circumstances of the resignation or termination of standing;
- whether and how the person exhibits the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers as well as a capacity to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code;
- the perspective of those who may have been harmed by the person's behavior;
- the degree to which responsibility for previous actions is acknowledged;
- any other relevant information.

If a person resigned ministerial standing in the midst of a Fitness Review or prior to the completion of a program of growth, those processes must be completed before the reinstatement of standing can be considered by the Committee on Ministry. If standing is reinstated, the person must fully disclose the previous termination or resignation of standing on the UCC Ministerial Profile in perpetuity.

Fitness Reviews happen infrequently in the life of the Church and are difficult, stress-producing experiences for all involved. Regardless of the outcome, a host of pastoral work remains to be done upon its conclusion for those affected by the minister's behaviors and by the process of a Fitness Review, including but not limited to the minister who was reviewed, the Local Church of membership, the person raising the concern, and the ministry setting. The Committee on Ministry should work collaboratively with the Association and Conference to determine the appropriateness and availability of any ongoing support.⁹⁰

A Fitness Review also has a considerable impact on those involved in conducting it, including members of the Committee on Ministry, the Response Team, and Association staff. Some Associations and Conferences find it helpful to provide an opportunity for these parties to gather with a facilitator to debrief and reflect on the impact of the Fitness Review following its conclusion.

⁹⁰ See Section 3 for resources for those affected by clergy sexual misconduct.