

SAMPLE FITNESS REVIEW NOTIFICATION LETTER FOR LOCAL CHURCH AS PLACE OF MEMBERSHIP

This notification letter is appropriate to send to the Local Church of Membership when the Minister in Question is on a Leave of Absence, holds Exempt Standing, is retired, or serves in a non-congregational setting.

To: PASTOR OF LOCAL CONGREGATION OR MEMBER OF LEADERSHIP TEAM OF LOCAL CONGREGATION, [e.g., Rev. Ada Bostick, pastor of First Congregational UCC]

From: Committee on Ministry, ASSOCIATION AND CONFERENCE

CC: MINISTER IN QUESTION

Date: DATE

Re: Fitness Review Process Has Been Initiated

On DATE, the Committee on Ministry received a concern raising questions regarding MINISTER NAME'S fitness for ministry. You are receiving this letter because MINISTER is a member of your congregation.

The letter raises concerns about MINISTER IN QUESTION receiving loans or gifts from at least one patient over the course of the past two years, totaling approximately \$10,000; concerns that other patients may have been asked for substantial financial gifts; and concerns that the minister may be taking financial and spiritual advantage of at least one vulnerable adult. At this time, no concerns about misappropriation of organization funds have been raised.

After considering redacted versions of these letters with identifying information removed, the Committee on Ministry of ASSOCIATION AND CONFERENCE found that if true, these concerns raise questions about a minister's fitness for ministry. The Committee on Ministry found that the letters raise questions about adherence to the following sections of the Ministerial Code:

- Covenant with God to: lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called.
- Covenant with self and family to: steward my time, talents, and personal financial resources responsibly; and accept responsibility for all debts I incur.
- Covenant with my ministry setting to: speak the truth in love, not using my position, power, or authority to exploit

This paragraph outlines in a general way the concern that has been raised. The sample provided is an example. Note that names are not used, except for the Minister in Question.

Please refer to Section 2:3 of the Manual on Ministry ("Ordained Ministerial Standing") for the UCC Ministerial Code. This letter highlights the portions of the Code related to the

any person nor using my position for unwarranted personal gain, including financial gain.

- Covenant with all lay and ordained ministers to: maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in both my personal and professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership.

These concerns also raise questions of competencies related to the following Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers:

- **Caring for All Creation: Practicing self-care and life balance; Attending to one's own spiritual and pastoral care, including engagement in supervision as appropriate.**
- **Participating in Theological Praxis: Practicing theological reflection and engagement as part of one's sense of ministerial identity; embodying the UCC Ministerial Code.**
- **Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets: Developing and maintaining a healthy sense of self as shaped by God, community, and life experiences; living in relationships of covenantal accountability with God and the Church; exhibiting strong moral character and personal integrity; respecting the dignity of all God's people; and understanding and ministering to stages of human development across the life span.**

If a Committee on Ministry refers this Fitness Review to another Association or to a Unified Fitness Review Committee, the following statement should be included:

The ASSOCIATION Committee on Ministry has referred this matter to the Committee on Ministry of the ASSOCIATION AND CONFERENCE/participates in a conference-wide UNIFIED FITNESS REVIEW COMMITTEE where all fitness concerns are referred. That body will handle the Fitness Review process from this point forward through the final conclusion of the Fitness Review. The ORIGINATING ASSOCIATION Committee on Ministry agrees to accept the decision of the COM of the ADJUDICATING ASSOCIATION AND CONFERENCE/UNIFIED FITNESS REVIEW COMMITTEE without further investigation. Your assigned Process Guide can answer any questions you may have.

The Interview Team (part of the Response Team) is tasked with gathering information that will help the Committee on Ministry determine if the concerns have merit. While the Committee on Ministry initially assigns who the Interview Team first interviews, the Interview Team is empowered to speak with additional

Please refer Section 1 of the UCC Manual on Ministry for specific Marks from the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers that relate to the concern that has been raised.

individuals who have relevant information pertaining to the concern. The Interview Team will prepare summaries of their interviews per the United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry and their training, and make a written and an in-person confidential report to the Committee on Ministry. The Interview Team members for this process are NAME and NAME; additional Interview Team members may be appointed as needed.

Process Guides (part of the Response Team) are tasked with proactively providing information to and answering questions from the persons raising the questions, the minister in question, the congregation's leadership, and the specialized ministry setting about the Fitness Review process. The Process Guide for the congregation is NAME.

The Process Guide will also provide you with a copy of the Fitness Review Process Chart and Section 2:6 in the Manual on Ministry ("Accountability and Support"), which outline the process the Committee on Ministry will use to consider these concerns. These resources can also be found at the following web link: http://www.ucc.org/ministers_manual.

The Committee is covenantally bound to continue its review even if MINISTER NAME chooses not to participate. We do hope that the minister will accept the Response Team's request for an interview so that they may share relevant information related to these concerns with them. The minister has signed a confidentiality notice regarding this Fitness Review process and may not talk about details with anyone for the duration of the Fitness Review.

The Fitness Review process outlined in the Manual on Ministry and adopted by the Committee on Ministry requires us to inform all covenantal partners that this review is underway. This includes:

- The Minister in Question;
- The person raising the question of fitness;
- The Local Church of membership;
- The Ministry setting, if different from the local church;
- The Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team of the national setting.

Ministers are not able to circulate their ministerial profiles while Fitness Reviews are underway; ministerial standing cannot be transferred until Fitness Review processes are resolved.

The Committee on Ministry considers only questions of fitness for ministry, not employment decisions. The Fitness Review process is a confidential ecclesiastical proceeding. In the United Church of

Christ confidentiality means sharing information only with someone who needs to know it at the time they need to know it. Confidentiality of this review process is expected from everyone involved, including church leaders. Your Process Guide will work with you to answer questions and provide understanding of the review process.

We understand that this can be a time of stress and anxiety for everyone involved in a Fitness Review. Please know that we take these concerns seriously, that we are interested in learning the validity of the concerns raised, and that we are praying for everyone involved in this process. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to contact NAME OF CONFERENCE MINISTER/ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER SERVING AS PROCESS GUIDE FOR CONGREGATION.

For the Committee,

NAME, Chair of Committee on Ministry, ASSOCIATION NAME