

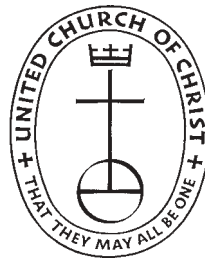
The Oversight of Ministries Authorized by the United Church of Christ

Section 8 of 10

United Church of Christ

MANUAL ON MINISTRY

Perspectives and Procedures for
Ecclesiastical Authorization of Ministry



Parish Life and Leadership Ministry
Local Church Ministries
A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ

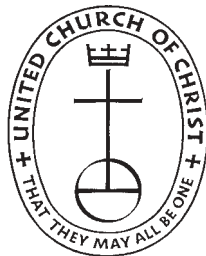
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Perspectives and Procedures for Ecclesiastical Authorization of Ministry

Manual on Ministry is published in ten separate sections or booklets. Each section is available separately or as part of the complete *Manual* that includes all ten sections in a single binder. The ten sections are:

1. Partners in Authorizing Ministry

An overview of the covenantal relationships and underlying assumptions about authorized ministry, including the ministerial codes.

2. Student in Care of Association

Commentary, processes, and procedures for those preparing to enter the Ordained Ministry of the United Church of Christ.

3. Ordained Ministry

Commentary, processes, and procedures for Ordained Ministry, including Ordained Ministerial Standing.

4. Dual Standing and Privilege of Call

Commentary, processes, and procedures for those ordained ministers of denominations other than the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who seek to serve in the United Church of Christ or who seek to enter the Ordained Ministry of the United Church of Christ. Ordained ministers of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) should see section 5, "Ordained Ministerial Partner."

5. Ordained Ministerial Partner

Commentary, processes, and procedures related to the reconciliation of ministries with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

6. Commissioned Ministry

Commentary, processes, and procedures for Commissioned Ministry, including Commissioned Ministerial Standing.

7. Licensed Ministry

Commentary, processes, and procedures for Licensed Ministry.

8. The Oversight of Ministries Authorized by the United Church of Christ

Commentary, processes, and procedures for the nurture and accountability of the ministries of the Church.

9. Ecclesiastical Endorsement

Commentary, processes, and procedures for those seeking to serve as chaplains in professional organizations and military or other U.S. government agencies.

10. Supplemental Materials

Commentary, appendices, and a glossary related to multiple sections of *Manual on Ministry*.

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OF MINISTRIES
AUTHORIZED
BY THE
UNITED
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PREFACE

It is no accident that this portion of *Manual on Ministry* includes the word “oversight” in its title. The word expresses a great deal about the nature of ministry as understood and practiced throughout the United Church of Christ. The word captures the commitment of this church to build up the Body of Christ by strengthening the ministries of the church. The church is called upon to support and equip its leaders while remaining faithful to the high standards and integrity of a ministry which is not ours, but God’s. “Oversight” is used because it conveys the commitment of the United Church of Christ to nurture those called to ministerial leadership, while at the same time we hold one another to account for the gospel of Jesus Christ and the ministry of the whole people of God.

The word “oversight” is used here because it expresses much in the English language that is conveyed by the Greek word *episcopé*—a word that comes to us from deep within the scriptures, our ecclesiology, and our faith traditions. The fact that these two words convey the same essential thought is informed by an exploration of their underlying root meanings.

Consider the root meanings associated with the Greek form of the word *episcopé*. At its core, *scopé* means sight or vision. It is the Greek word from which English derives such words as *tele-scope*, *peri-scope*, *micro-scope*, and the verb *to scope* something out. The prefix *epi-* connotes something of utmost importance or of the highest order. Thus our English words *epi-center*, *epi-tome*, and so on.

Therefore, the core meaning of the Greek word *episcopé* implies stepping back to view a situation or circumstance as a whole. It is to see something or someone fully and completely. Such complete understanding of a person or situation enables compassion in pastoral care. It also provides for supervision that is informed as well as merciful and just.

It is no accident that *episcopé* is sometimes translated with the English words “supervision” and “oversight.” Linguistically, the core meanings of all three words are similar. The root meanings of *scopé*, *vision*, and *sight* all suggest vision or seeing or being informed. That which was hidden is brought into the open. That which was obscured or blocked is visible and known.

Similarly all three prefixes (*epi-*, *super-*, *over-*) imply something of great importance and value. The form of seeing, discovery, and revelation described by these words is not small or little or of no consequence. “Oversight” and *episcopé* both convey a sense of vision and seeing and knowing that is vital, of central importance, and of great consequence.

We noted above that *episcopé* is a biblical word. An exploration of the biblical uses of the word *episcopé* may help us understand the use of “oversight” in this particular section of *Manual on Ministry*.

Many persons quickly associate the word (in its several forms) with the exercise of authority or power by one person over another. However, this

THE OVERSIGHT OF MINISTRIES AUTHORIZED BY THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

is not the primary or most frequent use of the word in the scriptures. Rather, the word is most often used to describe activities that nurture and strengthen those most in need.

Episcopé is often translated as “to visit” or “to see.” Jesus’ parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:36 is a good example of this:

I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited (*episkeptomai*) me.—Matthew 25:36, NRSV

We expect the ministry of the church to embody this notion of visitation. By visiting, we see the needs and respond appropriately to give support and nurture. Indeed, we often talk about pastoral visitation as an important component of ministry. This is one understanding of episcopal ministry. A ministry of *episcopé* or oversight is a ministry of visitation and support.

The scriptures also translate the various forms of *episcopé* when the meaning is clearly “to care for”:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for (*episkeptomai*) orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.—James 1:27, NRSV

A biblical understanding of episcopal ministry embodies notions similar to pastoral care and concern. Again, *episcopé* and oversight evoke notions of seeing the needs of others and coming forth in response to nurture and support those persons in their need.

We also find the word used with the meaning of supervision and oversight particularly as it relates to the ministry of the elders. However, even when so used, the author of 1 Peter is compelled to add a comment about the appropriate and faithful use of power and authority:

Now as an elder myself and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory to be revealed, I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight (*episkopeo*), not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it— not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.—1 Peter 5:1–3, NRSV

We are reminded of Jesus’ response to the disciples who requested positions of honor and authority when Jesus assumed power:

So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant.” —Mark 10:42–43, NRSV

The United Church of Christ values and affirms such an understanding of *episcopé*. Power and authority—even supervisory power and authority—must always be tempered with love, mercy, compassion, and justice. Episcopal authority is no exception. Throughout scriptures, episcopal oversight embodies this sense of visitation and care. Oversight is tending the flock from a perspective of service, nurture, and support.

It is no accident that this portion of *Manual on Ministry* includes the word “oversight” in its title. The word is used here intentionally to capture both the Biblical and linguistic meanings of *episcopé*. This resource is fundamentally about strengthening and equipping the ministries of the church so that they continue to be effective and embody the integrity God requires. The oversight of ministries requiring authorization by the United Church of Christ is about care and nurture. The oversight of ministries is about seeing what is most important and essential for the conduct of ministry. It is about supervision as a sacred responsibility to be carried out in a context of prayerfulness and candor as the Association Committee on the Ministry seeks to discern the Holy Spirit’s leading in each instance.

Parish Life & Leadership Ministry Team

March, 2001

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The United Church of Christ takes great care to provide adequate oversight for the ministries of the church for which ecclesiastical authorization is required. Ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministries of the United Church of Christ come under an oversight of watchful care provided by Associations, since Associations are responsible for authorizing these ministries on behalf of the whole church. In addition, Associations grant privilege of call, receive students in care, and provide other forms of authorization for ministry. It is incumbent upon Associations, in covenant with others, to exercise careful oversight of these authorized ministries so that they may be carried out in a manner reflective of the purposes set for them by the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ. This section of *Manual on Ministry* provides guidance and support to Associations as they fulfill this role and responsibility.

Oversight of authorized ministry includes nurturing authorized ministries and ensuring appropriate accountability. Like two sides of the same coin, both nurture and ecclesiastical accountability are necessary for maintaining the ministry of the church; neither can function in the absence of the other without compromising the fullness and integrity of the whole ministry.

Oversight as nurture involves deliberate and intentional effort to identify, build up, and strengthen those God has called into the authorized ministries of the church. Nurture provides usable feedback and reflection on those ministries and equips persons for effective and capable ministry on behalf of the church.

Oversight as ecclesiastical accountability involves evaluation, review, and assessment to ensure that those engaged in ministry embody faithful witness to, and extension of, the ministry of God in Jesus Christ—that they are accountable for the ministry they carry out on behalf of the church. When necessary, ecclesiastical accountability may include disciplinary actions, including removal of ecclesiastical authorization.

BYLAW PROVISIONS

In acting on behalf of the whole church, Associations are covenantally related to other Associations, to the persons they have authorized for ministry, and to local churches and other calling bodies. This spirit of covenantal relations is undergirded by the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ, which establishes the relationship and authority of the various covenantal partners related to ministerial authorization.

The Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ makes provision for Associations to provide oversight of authorized ministers. In the current Constitution and Bylaws, provisions related specifically to ministry are found in Article V of the Constitution and Article I of the Bylaws. The responsibility of the Association, including its role regarding ministerial oversight, is found within Article VII of the Constitution and Article II of the Bylaws. Specific Constitution and Bylaw provisions related to nurture and ecclesiastical accountability are found as an addendum to this section of *Manual on Ministry*.

Bylaw references to review, periodic review, and discipline fall within the oversight responsibilities described in this section of *Manual on Ministry*. By providing extended commentary and guidance, the manual enables Associations to follow and implement constitutional provisions with consistency and integrity throughout the church.

AUTHORIZED MINISTERS

Those authorized for ministry in the United Church of Christ include:

1. Students in care.
2. Ordained ministers holding their ordained ministerial standing within the Association, including those who are on leave of absence and those who are retired.
3. Ordained ministers of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) holding ordained ministerial partner standing within the Association.¹
4. Ordained ministers from other denominations who have been granted dual standing or privilege of call.
5. Commissioned ministers holding their commission within the Association, including those who are on leave of absence.
6. Licensed ministers who have been licensed by the Association or who have been approved for licensing.

Associations have the responsibility for extending nurture and ensuring ecclesiastical accountability for all authorized ministers, including retired ordained ministers and those serving in ministry settings other than in local churches such as chaplains, professors, pastoral counselors, and persons engaged in secular employment. All persons authorized for ministry are also expected to participate fully in the Association's oversight proceedings.

ASSOCIATIONS AND COMMITTEES ON THE MINISTRY

Each Association of the United Church of Christ determines how it will be organized to fulfill its oversight responsibilities related to authorization for ministry. Most Associations delegate all or most of the oversight functions to a single Committee on the Ministry² of the Association, and these guidelines and procedures address a single Committee on the Ministry. How-

1. The ordained ministries of the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) are reconciled. Provisions have been made for the oversight of persons with ordained ministry standing in one church but who are currently serving in the other and hold ordained ministerial partner standing. In general, the church where the person holds partner standing is primarily responsible for oversight, including both nurture and accountability. However, because the person maintains ordained ministerial standing (not partner standing) in the church of heritage, that church needs to be informed and invited to participate in providing oversight, especially in matters related to ecclesiastical accountability.

2. Throughout the United Church of Christ, there are a wide variety of names for the committee or committees of the Association with primary responsibility for ministerial authorization and oversight. Many Associations use "Church and Ministry Committee" as the name

ever, Associations that form several oversight committees or committees that divide responsibilities among several groups of people will also find these procedures useful.

It is very important that Associations clarify whether its Committee on the Ministry has the authority to act on issues of authorization and oversight or whether the Committee makes a recommendation to another body for action and decision. Most often, this is done within the Association bylaws or other official documents of the Association.

In the United Church of Christ, Associations provide oversight in several ways, including:

1. Empowering the Committee on the Ministry to act on behalf of the Association in all matters of ministerial authorization, nurture, and accountability. While the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ call for the Association to act upon the recommendation of the Committee on the Ministry with regard to the acts of ordination and commissioning, they do not specifically address decision-making authority in other instances. Experience throughout the church suggests that empowering Committees on the Ministry to act regarding nurture and accountability has much to commend it. This allows for a confidential setting in which persons are able to consider extremely sensitive information, and it encourages persons to share fully and completely while maintaining an appropriate sense of privacy. When authorized to take action on behalf of the Association, the Committee on the Ministry is accountable to the Association. Therefore, its decisions and actions are reported to the wider body and may be subject to review.
2. Determining that the Association Committee on the Ministry does not have authority to decide or take action regarding either authorization or accountability. Instead, the Committee makes a recommendation to the Association governing board or perhaps to a special meeting of the Association, called an ecclesiastical council³ for final action. It is recommended that wherever possible, a smaller body such as the Association governing board be the one to receive and act upon the recommendation of the Committee.

for this committee. Others refer to this body as a department or council or commission within the Association. Still others have several committees or sub-committees with varied names. *Manual on Ministry* follows the language contained within the *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ*. "Association Committee on the Ministry" should be understood as a generic title or name for the committee with this function, whatever specific name is used by a particular Association.

3. An Ecclesiastical Council is a special meeting of the Association called for the purposes of considering and acting upon the recommendations of an Association Committee on the Ministry regarding ecclesiastical authorization for ministry. Unless otherwise specified in the Association bylaws, an ecclesiastical council is called and convened following the policies, processes, and procedures in the Association for special meetings. The bylaw provisions for special meetings also govern who may attend and vote at an ecclesiastical council unless otherwise stated in the Association bylaws. In some cases, the Association governing board or body is empowered by the Association to act as the Association Ad Interim. When this is the case and where there are no other specific provisions for an ecclesiastical council in the Association bylaws, this body may meet as an ecclesiastical council and render final decisions regarding ministerial authorization.

3. Enabling the Association Committee on the Ministry to make final decisions in some instances while it makes a recommendation to another body in others. For example, the Committee may make a recommendation with regard to the granting of initial authorization, but is empowered to exercise full oversight responsibilities, including the removal of authorization.

Most Associations within the United Church of Christ have adopted *Manual on Ministry* and use its procedures to guide the work of their Committees on the Ministry. In addition to *Manual on Ministry*, some Associations adopt additional policy statements that specifically address particular areas of concern, such as sexual misconduct by persons authorized for ministry or policies expanding the requirements for students in care of the Association. Such policies should, minimally, define the issue, articulate the Association's stance, and name the body or bodies designated to act on behalf of the Association when implementing the policy.

FOUR OVERSIGHT PROCEEDINGS

Four distinct proceedings are related to the oversight of authorized ministries of the church: Periodic Support Consultation, Situational Support Consultation, Information Review, and Fitness Review. Taken together, the four proceedings provide a comprehensive system for oversight. It is important to understand the differences, however, so that each proceeding is considered and used appropriately.

The four proceedings may be distinguished from one another by considering the basic and underlying purpose of the proceeding. Is the proceeding fundamentally designed to provide nurture and support, or is the foundational purpose of the proceeding to describe the means and manner by which ecclesiastical authorization is maintained and persons are held accountable for the ministry they have been authorized to undertake?

- Support Proceedings. The Periodic Support Consultation and the Situational Support Consultation are intended to provide ongoing nurture and support for the authorized ministries of the church. All persons who have been called and authorized for ministry on behalf of the church may expect nurture and support from the church on an ongoing basis and in response to specific situations.
- Ecclesiastical Reviews. The Information Review and the Fitness Review provide the means for the review of ecclesiastical credentials and the continuance of ministerial authorization. It is incumbent upon all persons authorized for ministry on behalf of the church to continue to meet the expectations and standards for ministry in the church. The ecclesiastical reviews provide a means for the church to provide this form of ecclesiastical oversight.

The four proceedings may also be distinguished from one another by considering whether a particular proceeding is regularly scheduled or occurs only when circumstances warrant.

- Scheduled Proceedings. The Periodic Support Consultation and the Information Review are scheduled on a regular and recurring ba-

sis. It is expected that Associations provide regular opportunities for all authorized ministers to participate in these two proceedings. It is also expected that all authorized ministers fully participate in these proceedings at regular intervals throughout the tenure of their authorization.

- Occasional Proceedings. The Situational Support Consultation and the Fitness Review take place only when needed to address a particular situation or concern. While many authorized ministers never have occasion to participate in either proceeding, Associations need to be prepared to initiate either of these should circumstances warrant.

Each of the four oversight proceedings, illustrated below, is described briefly here. For a more extended and detailed description, see the section on the specific proceeding that follows this introduction and overview.

	Nurture Proceedings	Ecclesiastical Reviews
Scheduled Proceedings	Periodic Support Consultation	Information Review
Occasional Proceedings	Situational Support Consultation	Fitness Review

PERIODIC SUPPORT CONSULTATION

The purpose of the Periodic Support Consultation is to provide direct contact between the Association Committee on the Ministry and the authorized ministers. The goal of the Periodic Support Consultation is to strengthen and support the authorized ministries within the Association. This conference is developmental and growth-oriented and is designed to gain further understanding of the kind of support the authorized minister wants or needs. It aims to strengthen covenantal ties and provides an opportunity for reflection and feedback on the call to and practice of ministry.

Committees on the Ministry need to provide sufficient opportunities for Periodic Support Consultations so that all authorized ministers may participate on a regular and recurring basis.

Situational Support Consultation

The purpose of the Situational Support Consultation, which is a developmental consultation among various covenantal partners,⁴ is to address and deal with a situation, concern, or problem that has arisen in relation to an authorized minister or ministry setting. This pastoral consultation is convened by an Association Committee on the Ministry in response to a request from any of the covenantal partners, including the authorized minister, the local church where the person is a member, the calling body, or the Association. Typically, several covenantal partners are asked to participate in the conference in order to develop mutually a plan to address the situation.

Many authorized ministers and covenantal partners never have a need for a Situational Support Consultation. Others, from time to time, benefit from the availability of the pastoral care and oversight provided by the Association Committee on the Ministry through this proceeding.

A Situational Support Consultation is not intended to address matters of overall fitness for ministry or possible ethical violations.

Information Review

The purpose of the Information Review, which does not assume face-to-face meetings, is to provide a regular means by which an Association verifies that all authorized ministers continue to meet the basic standards required for authorization. For example, the Association Committee on the Ministry may use an Information Review to confirm that a person continues to hold local church membership and is actively engaged in a call to ministry appropriate for the authorization that has been granted.

All authorized ministers are expected to participate in regularly scheduled Information Reviews in order to maintain their authorization.

Fitness Review

The primary purpose of a Fitness Review, which involves the Association Committee on the Ministry and covenantal partners as well as persons directly affected by the review, is to determine whether an authorized minister continues to be fit for the ministry for which he or she is authorized.

An Association Committee on the Ministry initiates this review when an authorized minister's fitness for ministry is called into question. All authorized ministers must understand that if it is determined that a person has engaged in behavior unbecoming an authorized minister or is no longer fit for ministry in the United Church of Christ, ministerial authorization may

4. Covenantal Partner is the term used in *Manual on Ministry* to represent the four parties involved in an authorized ministry. These four covenantal partners include: the person who is authorized, the local church where this person is a member, the calling body where the person serves in authorized ministry, and the Association where authorization is held.

be suspended or terminated. A disciplinary action is permanently included in an authorized minister's record and is recorded in his or her profile. Reaffirmation of Fitness is also rapidly communicated throughout the church.

Few authorized ministers are ever the subject of a Fitness Review. However, when questions of ethics or fitness arise, the Fitness Review is intended to ensure that these concerns are taken seriously and considered in depth, and that decisions and resulting actions rendered are just, fair, merciful, and compassionate for all concerned.

APPEAL AND REVIEW OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The purpose of the appeal is to make provision for parties directly affected by a Fitness Review to air questions regarding the process followed during the review. The process for the Fitness Review is described in detail beginning on page 30 of this section of *Manual on Ministry*.

Care needs to be taken to ensure that the appeal process does not become a means by which persons or the work of the Association Committee on the Ministry are disregarded or are treated unfairly. It should be made clear to the body considering the appeal that its task is not to repeat the deliberative process of the Committee, but to assure that the process used was consistent with the process adopted by the Association.

The Association has final authority in authorization decisions for the United Church of Christ. If the authority to make the final decisions rests with the Association governing board or other designated body, there is no appeal as the Association is acting on its own behalf.

When authority to render decisions and take action has been delegated to the Committee on the Ministry acting faithfully on behalf of the Association, the Committee's decisions may be subject to review. It is recommended that the bylaws of the Association specify which Committee decisions are subject to appeal, the basis on which an appeal may be made, who may file an appeal, the body that hears the appeal, and the process for hearing and making a final decision regarding an appeal.

Decision Subject to Appeal

It is important to specify whether all of the decisions and actions of the Association Committee on the Ministry are subject to appeal or only those that are specified. At a minimum, it is recommended that disciplinary actions, particularly those resulting in a change of ministerial authorization, be subject to review and appeal. Some Associations provide for appeal of all authorization decisions and actions, including those related to a person's initial authorization. In some settings, persons may appeal a Committee's failure to act upon an authorization concern within a reasonable time. It is important that all parties have clarity about which decisions may be reviewed by the body that provides oversight to the work of the Association Committee on the Ministry.

Grounds for an Appeal

The body designated to receive requests for appeal needs to be clear regarding the grounds on which an appeal can be sought. It is recommended that grounds for appeal of oversight decisions be limited to a review of the process used so as to promote consistency of policy implementation, restrict access to confidential and highly sensitive information, promote information sharing with an Association Committee on the Ministry, and minimize politicization of an ecclesiastical authorization matter. This provides a mechanism for holding the Committee on the Ministry accountable for the manner by which it exercises its role and responsibility on behalf of the Association.

Persons Who May File an Appeal

It is helpful to clarify who may initiate an appeal as well. Some Associations provide that only an authorized minister may file an appeal on a matter regarding his or her own authorization. Others provide for all Association members, including local churches, to file an appeal. Still others provide for an appeal on the part of a person raising a concern about fitness in a Fitness Review. It is recommended that each covenantal partner or other principal participant in a proceeding be provided an opportunity to file an appeal provided that the covenantal partner or person has been adversely affected by a decision of the Association Committee on the Ministry. For example, in a Fitness Review, either the authorized minister or the person raising the question of fitness may file an appeal if she or he were adversely affected by the decision and believed the Committee failed to follow the policies and procedures adopted by the Association.

The Body Hearing an Appeal

Associations that allow some or all authorization actions to be appealed must be clear regarding the body that hears the appeal. In some Associations, the bylaws direct the calling of an ecclesiastical council to serve as the body to which ministerial oversight issues are appealed, while others direct appeals to a smaller body, typically the Association council or governing board or a specially appointed appeal board. Because of the extremely sensitive nature of matters considered in a Fitness Review, it is recommended that Associations designate a small body—such as the Association council, board of directors, or a special review board—to hear the appeal.

The Process for Hearing an Appeal

The process for hearing an appeal should include the following provisions to ensure fairness:

1. Prior to considering the appeal, the Association needs to spend a considerable period of time orienting those voting on the appeal about Association processes and policies, the task of the appeal body, and pertinent legal and ethical implications of their work.

2. Only registered voting delegates may participate in the deliberation and decision-making phases of the meeting.
3. Every person who has a vote in the appeal process must be present for the entire time during which the appeal is being considered.

These provisions are especially important in those Associations where an appeal is heard by the entire Association meeting in an ecclesiastical council. Suggested procedures for hearing an appeal are outlined on page 51 in this section of *Manual on Ministry*.

Outcomes of an Appeal

The possible outcomes of an appeal include:

1. Affirmation that the process used was consistent with the one adopted for use by the Association.
2. Acknowledgment that the process used was not the one adopted for use by the Association. The body may then direct the decision-making body to reconsider its action following the adopted process, policies, and procedures of the Association.

RESOURCE PERSONS TO THE ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE ON THE MINISTRY

Most Committees on the Ministry find it necessary to draw on resources beyond the Committee to cover various functions, including:

- Making use of persons beyond the Committee to offer pastoral support to persons with whom the Committee is involved around an authorization matter—for example, a mentor for students in care or support for an authorized minister during a Fitness Review. The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries provides resources for training persons to provide this support.
- Delegating to an appropriate individual the responsibility for keeping and maintaining the records of the Committee. This includes both the public records such as minutes and the confidential records pertaining to each authorized minister. The record keeper may be the secretary or clerk of the Committee, an Association registrar, or an appropriate member of the conference staff. This person may also be asked to manage the files of authorized ministers.
- Calling on a person with professional expertise in a particular subject area, such as church conflict or clergy taxes, to serve as a resource in a Situational Support Consultation or a Fitness Review.
- Using response teams to gather information on the Committee's behalf when a Fitness Review is underway. The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries offers resources for use in training persons to gather information to inform the Committee's decision-making.

- Asking Conference or Association staff to provide administrative support to the work of the Committee.

It is important to clarify the roles and functions of outside resource persons and take steps to ensure that no single individual is inappropriately involved in multiple roles. For instance, during a Fitness Review, it is impossible to function effectively both as the pastor to the authorized minister whose fitness is being reviewed and as staff to the Committee that addresses and acts on the question of fitness without actual or perceived bias.

PRINCIPLES TO KEEP IN MIND

Distinctions between the Authorizing Body and the Calling Body

It is important to distinguish an Association's authorization and oversight from the decision of a local church or other calling body to extend a call, provide employment supervision, or terminate employment of an authorized minister. The Association does not make decisions regarding the call of an authorized minister—this is the responsibility of the calling body. Likewise, local churches or other calling bodies cannot render authorization decisions on behalf of the whole church—this is the responsibility of the Association.

The distinction between authorization and call issues holds similar parallels in other professions. For example, a public school teacher is licensed by a state regulatory agency and is then able to seek employment as a teacher in a specific school system. The responsibility to hire, supervise, and possibly terminate the teacher belongs to the specific school system and not to the regulatory agency. In the church, the Association fulfills a function similar to the state licensing board in that it authorizes a person for ministry on behalf of the whole United Church of Christ. Calling bodies are similar to school systems in exercising employment responsibilities when extending a specific call for ministry in a particular setting.

Distinctions between Ecclesiastical and Legal Proceedings

The Association Committee on the Ministry must make clear to all parties the distinction between legal and ecclesiastical proceedings. Although civil or criminal implications may arise in some circumstances, the Committee addresses itself only to ecclesiastical matters.

The role of the Association is to assess, evaluate, and decide matters regarding a person's authorization to minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. In contrast, legal proceedings are addressed as either civil or criminal matters in a court of law.

For example, an Association Committee on the Ministry may deem it important to proceed with a Fitness Review and consider a person's fitness for ministry even if a court has rendered a verdict of "not guilty" or absolved the person of legal responsibility. Despite the judgment of the courts,

a person might still be found unfit for ministry after a Fitness Review. The opposite circumstance may also be true where a Committee on the Ministry determines that a civil or criminal conviction, such as civil disobedience, may not affect a person's authorization for ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Attorneys and Their Role in Ecclesiastical Proceedings

There is no role for attorneys in ecclesiastical proceedings. While all parties are free to seek private legal counsel as they see fit, federal and state constitutional jurisprudence makes it clear that governmental bodies, including officers of the court, cannot interfere with a church's responsibility for determining who can and cannot minister on its behalf.

Conflict of Interest and Perceptions of Bias

Associations need to take steps to avoid potential conflicts of interest and minimize perceptions that a process is biased or unfair. Ideally, the Association establishes policies and procedures that will excuse certain members of its Committee on the Ministry from participating in certain proceedings where a conflict of interest may prejudice the outcome.

Generally, other than in Periodic Support Consultations conducted in large groups, members of an Association Committee on the Ministry do not participate as Committee members in oversight proceedings involving:

- Themselves
- A member of their family
- A member of their local church
- A staff member of their local church
- Other persons where a dual relationship, a conflict of interest, or the appearance of such a conflict may call into question the fairness of the Committee work

An Association Committee on the Ministry member who is removed from a proceeding for one of these reasons may still be asked to provide information to the Committee that may be useful in its deliberations.

Most Committees on the Ministry provide an opportunity as early as possible in any oversight proceeding to consider eliminating possible conflicts of interest and minimizing perceptions of bias. After the Committee reviews the circumstances under which it may be inappropriate for persons to participate, each member should disclose if they should be excused, with or without discussing the reason. The Committee may also ask a person to step aside, or the individual and the Committee may discuss the circumstance and reach a mutual agreement regarding the individual's participation.

Conflict of interest is generally not a concern in Periodic Support Consultations conducted with several authorized ministers and members of the local churches they serve, and it may not be necessary for persons to be excused from participation. In Periodic Support Consultations conducted

individually, however, the Committee may wish to take steps to ensure that there is no actual or perceived conflict of interest between the person and any member of the Committee involved in the proceeding.

Confidentiality

There are times, particularly during a Situational Support Consultation or a Fitness Review, when an Association Committee on the Ministry has access to sensitive and personal information about a person authorized for ministry, a person raising questions regarding fitness, or a local church or other calling body and its members. All persons involved in these proceedings must understand the need for confidentiality.

Confidentiality can be understood to mean that only those who need to know are given information when that information enables them to make informed decisions that they are duly authorized to make. Sharing information with those who need to know is not viewed as compromising the integrity or confidentiality of the process. For example, leaders of a local church currently employing an authorized minister need to know when serious questions are raised about this person so they can both take responsible action regarding the person's continued employment and offer support to the authorized minister and his or her family.

While the details of information shared with an Association Committee on the Ministry may be confidential in nature, the action of the Committee to grant an authorization for ministry or to discipline an authorized minister, including removal of her or his authorization for ministry, is not a private action. Much as an initial authorization for ministry is widely known and shared within the church community and the broader public, disciplinary actions, such as removal of authorization for ministry, are also treated as a matter to be shared with the Association and other appropriate bodies. The Committee minutes and records need to convey the decisions and actions taken by the Association Committee on the Ministry and other Association bodies.

The deliberations themselves, however, and the details that inform the outcome may be withheld from public disclosure. These remain confidential and are shared only with appropriate authorities and responsible parties with a valid need for the information. All Committee members need to refrain from discussing the details of Committee proceedings outside the setting of the Association Committee on the Ministry except with a designated member of the Conference staff or as agreed to by the Committee.

The Association Committee on the Ministry needs to identify a person who can serve as secretary and keep the confidential records of oversight proceedings.

Care must be taken not to confuse confidentiality with privileged communication. Privileged communication is a precise legal term that must meet certain specific conditions. Historically, privileged communication referred to the priest/penitent privilege that can shield from subpoena information shared in an act of confession. Communication between a pastor and a person to whom the pastor is relating in a formal pastoral role is, on some

occasions, considered to meet the requirements of privileged communication and consequently may be protected from forced disclosure in a secular court of law.

In most states, the records of Association Committees on the Ministry and information shared with Committees are not considered privileged communication. Members of Committees on the Ministry and Committee records may be subpoenaed for use in civil or criminal court proceedings. However, some records may be withheld from the secular courts on the basis of the separation of church and state if divulging these particular records would lead the courts to “excessive entanglement” in religious doctrine, discipline, or polity.

An Association’s Cooperation with Other Associations

In the United Church of Christ, the authority to grant and remove status regarding ministerial authorization rests with the Association holding the authorization. For students in care, the authority to grant and remove in-care status rests with the Association in which the person’s local church membership is held.

However, at times, more than one Association, Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), or other ecclesiastical body of another denomination may have an interest in or concern about the ministerial authorization of a particular person. It is recommended that when more than one Association or ecclesiastical body is involved, the Association holding the authorization invite the other Association or ecclesiastical body to cooperate in appropriate ways.

Such cooperation is often sought when a student in care in one Association is attending seminary located within a different Association. The authorizing Association may request the Association in which the seminary is located to include the person in Association events and offer support.

Cooperation is also helpful when an authorized minister whose fitness is questioned currently has ministerial authorization in an Association other than the Association where the misconduct or situation in question occurred. The Association holding the ministerial authorization may ask the Association where the situation in question occurred to gather information on its behalf and/or provide pastoral support for the person raising the question of fitness. The Association where the situation in question occurred needs to be sensitive to the role of the Association holding ministerial authorization and making final decisions. Similar types of cooperation also may occur between a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Region and a United Church of Christ Association when a situation involves a person with ordained ministerial partner standing.

Cooperation between Associations is also necessary when a person is called from one Association to another and a concern is raised prior to completion of a transfer of ministerial authorization.

In all cases where Associations work with each other, both need to be aware of the policies operating in each. Before beginning an oversight proceeding, it is helpful if the Associations reach an agreement on the way to proceed and clarify decision-making.

Record Keeping

It is important for Association Committees on the Ministry to maintain careful records of their authorizations for ministry and to review them regularly to make sure they are current. The records that are maintained are generally of three types: minutes, rosters, and confidential records.

Careful minutes, including persons present and actions taken, are to be maintained for all Committee on the Ministry meetings. Meeting minutes should include enough detail so that the full Association or future Association Committees can grasp the nature of the deliberations undertaken and the decisions made. The minutes are the public record of the Committee proceedings and as such are available to the Association for review.

Associations are charged with the responsibility of maintaining the lists of those who are on the rolls of the Association. These rosters typically include clear delineation of all ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers and may include persons with other authorizations as well.

Confidential records contain records of Association Committee on the Ministry deliberations and other materials that were used to inform Committee decision and action. For example, a person's ministerial profile may be retained in the confidential records. The profile would inform the Committee's action to grant standing, but would not be part of the public record or minutes that are shared with the Association and others throughout the church.

Specific guidelines regarding record-keeping for each of the four oversight proceedings are described elsewhere in this section of *Manual on Ministry*. Please see the table of contents.

Reporting

In general, all actions taken by an Association pertaining to ministerial authorization are reported to the membership of the Association and also to Local Church Ministries (a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ)⁵ and the Office of General Ministries (a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ)⁶ Local Church Ministries circulates the report among other Conferences and Associations and ensures that the information is available to those engaged in the processes of search and call in the United Church of Christ. The Office of General Ministries maintains the official roster of United Church of Christ ministers for the Yearbook and other purposes.

Actions to be reported throughout the Association and to the wider church

5. Hereafter referred to as "Local Church Ministries." Local Church Ministries is a covenanted ministry of the United Church of Christ with general oversight of issues related to ministerial authorization and leadership throughout the denomination. Prior to July 1, 2000, the Office for Church Life and Leadership fulfilled this responsibility for the United Church of Christ.

6. Hereafter referred to as "Office of General Ministries." The Office of General Ministries is a covenanted ministry of the United Church of Christ with responsibility for maintaining the roster(s) of authorized ministers on behalf of the denomination. Prior to July 1, 2000, the Secretary of the United Church of Christ carried out this responsibility.

include the granting, suspension, or removal of ministerial authorization. In addition, disciplinary actions that do not change a person's authorization are also reported, as well as changes in status such as retired or leave of absence.

Specific guidelines regarding reporting are outlined for each proceeding described in this section of *Manual on Ministry*.

CULTURAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Because the United Church of Christ is a church encompassing varied cultures and ethnic backgrounds, it is important for the Association Committee on the Ministry to be sensitive to cultural differences. In working with people from a cultural background not substantially represented in the Committee, it is important to secure the insights, advice, and counsel of others who share the cultural and ethnic background of the person to foster adequate sensitivity and understanding between the person and the Committee. Minimally, language translation services may be needed to enable the Committee to work with persons whose primary language is other than English.

OVERSIGHT AS SACRED TRUST

The oversight responsibilities related to nurture and accountability given to Associations are sacred trusts that directly impact the effectiveness and integrity of the ministries of the church of Jesus Christ. These responsibilities are ones to be carried out in a context of prayerfulness and candor as the Association Committee on the Ministry seeks to discern the Holy Spirit's leading in each instance.

The purpose of the Periodic Support Consultation is to provide support for the authorized minister, to encourage ministers' personal and vocational development, and to provide an occasion for reflection and feedback on the practice of ministry. These conferences also provide opportunities to review and strengthen the relationship among the covenantal partners and keep the church apprised of the person's ministry.

Periodic Support Consultations occur regularly, typically every one to three years, and include direct contact between authorized ministers and the Committee on Ministry. In this proceeding, the Committee does not seek to address issues related to an authorized minister's fitness, significant concerns or problems, or standards for authorization. These are addressed in a Fitness Review, Situational Support Consultation, or Information Review, as indicated.

PARTICIPATION

It is expected that all authorized ministers participate in Periodic Support Consultations as provided by the Association. The Association should make every effort to meet in person with authorized ministers, taking into consideration the persons' schedules. Special provision may be needed for authorized ministers such as military chaplains or missionaries who serve outside the Association; the Association may make arrangements to meet with these individuals in person when they are scheduled to be in the area.

Authorized ministers who fail to participate lose this opportunity to experience growth, nurture, and support for their ministry. Failure to participate in a Periodic Support Consultation without the approval of the Association or the repeated refusal to participate may raise concerns about the willingness of persons to fulfill the responsibilities of authorized ministry, which may lead the Association to explore these issues through a Situational Support Consultation.

ISSUES ADDRESSED

Many issues may be addressed in Periodic Support Consultations. All may not be covered in every instance, but over the course of several years, all or most of these may be explored:

- *The Growth of the Person.* How does the authorized minister see herself or himself growing and developing? In what types of continuing education has he or she participated and found meaning? Does the authorized minister have a plan for growth and development? How can the local church or other calling body and the Association be supportive in the developing or carrying out of this plan?
- *The Ministry Setting.* Are there particular challenges or joys in the setting for ministry in which the person serves? Has an annual review been taking place in the local church or other calling body? Have these been helpful? Is the local church or other calling body providing the support needed by the authorized minister? Are there points of potential conflict between the authorized minister and the local church or other calling body that need attention?

- *The Fulfillment of the Person.* Does the authorized minister have a sense of fulfillment in her or his ministry? Are there elements in the person's ministry that contribute to feelings of staleness or inadequacy? Are there elements in the person's ministry that are bringing special excitement? Are there new or emerging dimensions to his or her ministry that are challenging?
- *The Sense of Call.* How does the person understand her or his call at this time? In what ways is the sense of call being nourished and sustained? Are there tensions or conflicts between the person's sense of call and the requirements of the ministry?
- *The Terms of the Call.* Are these still being honored by all of the parties? Are there terms that need to be renegotiated, added to, or removed from the original call?
- *The Covenantal Relationships.* Are the agreements and understandings among the partners being honored and fulfilled? Is the Association giving evidence of its interest in the ministry and providing programs and support needed by the authorized minister and ministry? If the authorized minister is in a ministry setting other than a local church, is the person an active member of a local church of the United Church of Christ? Is the local church supporting the person and taking an active interest in his or her ministry?
- *Participation in the Wider Church.* Is the authorized minister participating in the life of the Association, the Conference, and the wider church?
- *The Functions of the Ministry.* Is the ministry for which the person was licensed, commissioned, or granted ordained ministerial standing being performed? This is especially important to review when the ministry setting is other than a local church.
- *The Ministerial Codes and the Church's Expectations.* Ministerial codes for ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers and a code for the local church in relation to its pastor are found in the "Partnership in Ministry" section of *Manual on Ministry*. In addition, the church's expectations of its authorized ministers are outlined in each respective section of *Manual on Ministry*. Committees may wish to inquire about any of the areas covered by these documents, including reflection and conversation about the person's faith affirmations, understanding of ministry, denominational and ecumenical commitments, knowledge and skills, and personal qualities and characteristics. It may also be helpful to ask the person to review her or his ordination paper or commissioning paper, or the Statement on Ministry in his or her ministerial profile, and comment on present beliefs, understandings, and commitments.
- *The Ethics of the Person.* Is the authorized minister aware of, and sensitive to, those personal characteristics and ministerial ethics valued and expected by the United Church of Christ? Does the person know and affirm the applicable minister's code and the church's expectations of its ministers as found in *Manual on Ministry*?

WHEN TO CONDUCT THE CONSULTATION

The Association Committee on the Ministry needs to establish a schedule for conducting Periodic Support Consultations to ensure that every authorized minister has an opportunity to participate in this conference every one to three years. Schedules include:

- A comprehensive consultation—every one to three years—in which the person meets with the Association Committee on the Ministry. For example, in a three-year cycle, the Committee could meet with one-third of its authorized ministers each year for a Periodic Support Consultation.
- A consultation during strategic times in the lives of persons authorized for ministry. For example, Periodic Support Consultations may be provided every year during the first three years of ordained or commissioned ministry, around the seventh or eighth year, around mid-career, in the pre-retirement years, and so on. This recognizes that persons may experience unusual periods of stress in the ministries during these times.
- A consultation offered near the time of the anniversary date of persons' ordinations or commissioning, or the anniversary dates of their calls to their present ministries. For example, by holding a periodic review for all persons in conjunction of each five years of ministry, the Committee would meet with one-fifth of its authorized ministers each year.
- A consultation incorporated into the annual renewal of authorization required for ordained and commissioned ministers on leave of absence, ordained ministers with privilege of call, students in care, and licensed ministers. For these persons, this conference may include discussion regarding how a search for a call is proceeding, assurance of active involvement in a local church, or appraisal of desire to resume active ministry.

WAYS TO CONDUCT THE CONSULTATION

Some Associations may find the demands made on a committee of busy volunteers to be more than the committee can be reasonably expected to meet. Association Committees on the Ministry may need to look for creative ways to engage others in their responsibilities, ensuring that any consultations conducted on the Committee's behalf are reported promptly to the Committee.

Associations can provide Periodic Support Consultations in a variety of ways, including:

- *Face-to-Face Meeting with the Committee.* The Committee on the Ministry may meet with the authorized minister alone or with the person and representatives from the calling body or local church.
- *One-on-One Meeting.* One or two representatives of the Committee on the Ministry could meet with the authorized minister in his or her setting for ministry. The Committee representatives could be

Committee members, a member of the Conference or Association staff, and/or another person designated by the Committee to meet with the person on the Committee's behalf.

- *Group Meeting.* Several authorized ministers could meet at one time with one or more members of the Committee on the Ministry. The Committee determines the questions to be asked, allowing each person an opportunity to share information about her or his ministry.
- *Retreat.* A retreat could be designed for authorized ministers that would allow time for individual reflection, peer group reflection, and time for interaction with staff and Association Committee on the Ministry representatives.
- *Written Survey.* Some Committees on the Ministry use a written instrument to gather information and reflections from its authorized ministers. Often the responses to the written questions become a basis for further dialogue in an individual group or retreat setting.

Over the course of several years, the Association Committee on the Ministry needs to consider using a variety of approaches in offering Periodic Support Consultations. This provides for greater depth and breadth and keeps the process interesting for the Committee and the authorized ministers.

OUTCOMES

Periodic Support Consultations may result in one or more outcomes, including:

- Affirmation of particular strengths in ministry demonstrated by the person.
- Acknowledgment of, and encouragement for, particular interests and areas for vocational development.
- Encouragement for care of self and family.
- Encouragement for a more comprehensive program of continuing education.
- Encouragement that the person participate in colleague groups and networks where available.
- Ongoing support during hard times and referrals for additional support resources where appropriate.
- A program of personal or vocational growth and development that may be carried out in consultation with the Association Committee on the Ministry.
- Follow-up work with the ministry setting to address a need identified during the consultation.
- A recommendation that the person seek the services of a career-counseling center or consult with the Conference Minister or other staff person.

- A programmatic response by the Association to address similar needs of several persons identified during the conferences.

RECORD KEEPING

Most Association Committees on the Ministry find it helpful to maintain records regarding Periodic Support Consultations, including the frequency and pattern of the opportunities, the nature and style of the conference, and the issues discussed.

The confidential records for each authorized minister should contain information and outcomes of his or her participation in Periodic Support Consultations. In those cases where an individual does not participate in this scheduled conference, the individual's confidential records should indicate whether the absence was with or without the approval of the Association.

REPORTING

In reporting to the appropriate Association body, an Association Committee on the Ministry may include information regarding the nature of the opportunities provided, the number of persons participating, and some of the issues and concerns that have emerged as the Committee conducts Periodic Support Consultations. Individual names are not reported.

A Situational Support Consultation takes place when something has occurred that needs to be looked at in some depth. In most cases, this consultation is precipitated by a situation or concern that has arisen with the authorized minister, the setting for ministry, or the relationship between the authorized minister and the local church or other calling body.

In a Situational Support Consultation, the Association Committee on the Ministry is seeking to clarify the specific issues, find the extent to which there may be an impediment to effective ministry, and identify ways for actions to be taken to resolve an identified problem. The desired outcome is for all covenantal partners involved to agree to a course of action that will be evaluated together at a specified later date.

PARTICIPATION

A Situational Support Consultation may be requested by any covenantal partner. An authorized minister may want support from the Committee on Ministry in addressing a concern with the setting for ministry. A calling body or local church of membership may seek assistance in working through an issue, or the Committee itself may initiate a consultation if circumstances warrant. Conference staff familiar with the situation may also share information with the Committee to help the Committee determine whether a Situational Support Consultation is called for.

When a Situational Support Consultation is convened, it is appropriate to include all covenantal partners most directly involved in the situation. If,

SITUATIONAL SUPPORT CONSULTATION

for example, an authorized minister requests a conference to address a particular conflict with a calling body, both the authorized minister and the calling body would be given opportunity to participate in order to address the concern together.

ISSUES ADDRESSED

The consultative nature of a Situational Support Consultation may be used to address a wide range of concerns including:

- A situation that may be hindering the person's ability to practice or function in ministry effectively.
- A request by a person for an opportunity to meet with the Association Committee on the Ministry to reflect on his or her ministry and consider options for the future.
- A concern caused by a change in the setting for ministry with resulting changes in the conditions under which the call was extended and accepted. For example, an authorized minister may have changed positions from a church-sponsored counseling center to private practice in counseling, or health benefits originally offered by a calling body have been canceled.
- A concern about conflict that has arisen between the authorized minister and the local church or other calling body, or certain members within the local church or other calling body.
- Other issues or concerns involving the relationship among the various covenantal partners.

The Situational Support Consultation allows the Committee to address issues in a nurturing, pastoral manner—identifying the issues, determining the concerns that need to be addressed, and working toward a plan of action with all covenantal partners.

A Situational Support Consultation is not intended to address questions about a person's fitness for ministry. If, during the course of the conference, the Committee becomes aware of information that raises a question about the authorized minister's fitness for ministry, the Committee initiates a Fitness Review.

WHEN TO CONDUCT THE CONSULTATION

Situational Support Consultations are convened by the Association Committee on the Ministry in response to requests from any of the covenantal partners. The conference's style is primarily supportive in nature and provides an occasion for covenantal partners to confer and work together intentionally to resolve a specific concern or to address a particular situation.

In some cases, a preliminary pastoral intervention prior to a Situational Support Consultation is helpful. This provides an opportunity for a representative of the Committee on the Ministry to meet with the authorized minister and/or other parties in an attempt to address the concern that has been raised. For example, if an authorized minister is experiencing harassment or abuse, the Committee may choose to begin with a pastoral intervention with the persons involved. Through interventions, the Committee representative may

help the parties determine whether there are other sources of assistance in addition to those offered through a Situational Support Consultation.

WAYS TO CONDUCT THE CONSULTATION

The Committee on Ministry can conduct Situational Support Consultations in a variety of ways. Most often, representatives from the Committee meet with the covenantal partners involved and others in a position to be helpful to gather information about the situation and clearly define the issue. The Committee may decide to meet with the involved parties individually or in a group to share its concern, identify the issue requiring nurture, explore the extent to which there may be impediments to effective and faithful ministry, and outline options that are available for dealing with the situation. This consultative proceeding may take place over a series of meetings.

If the authorized minister is in a ministry position other than in a local church, appropriate ways may need to be found for the local church where the person is a member and the calling body to be informed about, and involved in, a Situational Support Consultation.

OUTCOMES

A Situational Support Consultation can result in the following outcomes:

- *No Further Action Required.* The concern is explored and the consultation provides sufficient opportunity for reflection or counsel. No further action is needed.
- *Mutually Agreed-upon Plan of Action.* The concern is explored with all the parties involved, and a plan to address or correct the situation is agreed upon with checkpoints to review progress. Those involved agree to all the actions called for in the plan.
- *Advisory Statement.* The Association Committee on the Ministry prepares an advisory statement about the situation if all parties cannot agree to follow a mutually agreed-upon plan of action. Such an advisory statement may outline the needed course(s) of action determined by the Association Committee on the Ministry, any potential consequences related to the course(s) of action, and mention of specific resources available related to the course of action. The advisory statement is shared with all covenantal partners and any other parties directly involved in the situation. The advisory statement becomes a permanent part of the records of the Association.

RECORD KEEPING

In considering what records to keep, it is important to remember that a Situational Support Consultation is primarily supportive in nature and intended to nurture the person who has been authorized. With that in mind, records are maintained in such a way that all covenantal partners are encouraged to share openly and honestly, seeking to strengthen the ministry.

In general, the details of a Situational Support Consultation are kept in the confidential files of the Association while the public record is limited to the minutes which includes the covenantal partners involved, a description of the process followed to address the concern, and a general statement of the outcome.

The confidential records should include a summary of the contacts between the Association Committee on the Ministry and the involved parties, a description of the concern, and steps taken to address the concern. The details of any agreements, recommendations, or advisory statements resulting from a Situational Support Consultation should be made in writing and kept in the authorized minister's and/or calling body's confidential file where they can be accessed by appropriate parties in the future.

REPORTING

The details of the Situational Support Consultation need only be reported to the covenantal partners who participated in the consultation. This enables each covenantal partner to carry out its own particular role and responsibility. For example, if an outcome includes an agreement between an authorized minister and the calling body, the reporting enables both to know what is expected of them and helps them to make informed decisions.

In reporting to the appropriate Association body, an Association Committee on the Ministry may include the number of Situational Support Consultations conducted and overall learnings from the conferences. Specific situations are not reported.

INFORMATION REVIEW

Information Reviews provide opportunities for Association Committees on the Ministry to verify that authorized ministers still qualify for the ministerial authorization that they have been granted. These reviews occur regularly, typically at least once a year, and usually do not assume a face-to-face meeting between the authorized ministers and the Committee.

Basic record keeping is not a substitute for an Information Review. The Committee on the Ministry needs to review updated information provided through an Information Review and make decisions regarding continuing authorization for ministry.

PARTICIPATION

All persons authorized for ministry by an Association are responsible for informing the Association of changes in their circumstance that may affect their authorization. The Association Committee on the Ministry is responsible for gathering updated information on a regular and timely basis from those it has authorized for ministry. After reviewing the current information, the Committee then exercises judgment about a person's continued ministerial authorization.

INFORMATION REVIEWED

Information typically sought for the Information Review includes:

1. Current address and contact information.
2. Continuing membership and participation in a local church of the United Church of Christ within the Association, unless a pastor is serving a local church not affiliated with the United Church of Christ. As noted in the *Bylaws of the United Church of Christ*, a pastor's church membership is in the local church he or she serves, regardless of denominational affiliation.
3. A call to a ministry that the Association recognizes as valid⁷ and that is consistent with the type of authorization held, unless the person is retired, on leave of absence, or seeking a position.
4. Continuing residence within the bounds of the Association, except in the case of retired ministers and those living beyond the boundaries of the United States.

WHEN TO CONDUCT THE REVIEW

Association Committees on the Ministry need to establish a schedule—typically at least once a year—to receive information from authorized ministers and to review records regularly to be sure they are current.

The Information Review may be incorporated into the annual renewal required for some persons, which may include an in-person meeting with the Committee. Annual renewal is required for ordained and commissioned ministers on leave of absence, ordained ministers with privilege of call, students in care, and licensed ministers.

WAYS TO CONDUCT THE REVIEW

Because the Information Review does not assume face-to-face meetings between persons in authorized ministries and the Committee on the Ministry, the Committee may make use of a simple questionnaire and/or make telephone contact with each authorized minister to gather information. In

7. To be recognized as valid, calling bodies typically embody the following characteristics:

- The organization is a legitimate body with an identifiable organizational structure, governance, and leadership. This organization may or may not be an ecclesiastical body but it must meet the criteria listed below.
- The organization must be willing to recognize and confirm the individual's personal sense of call to ministry.
- The organization must be willing and able to provide support and oversight for the particular individual's call to ministry.
- The organization must be willing and committed to participate as a full covenantal partner in the four-way covenant with the individual, the Association, and the local church where the individual is a member.

many Associations, staff may be asked to gather the information for consideration by the Association Committee on the Ministry. If, after reviewing the updated information, the Committee on Ministry determines that a change in ecclesiastical status is appropriate, the Committee needs to make every effort to make personal contact with the person before acting to change the authorization.

OUTCOMES

Based on the information gathered, the Association Committee on the Ministry may determine that:

- All basic requirements for the authorized ministry are met and authorization continues without change.
- There is some question about whether the basic requirements are met and more information is needed. The Committee may ask to meet with the person to clarify questions or concerns. If those questions are not resolved to the Committee's satisfaction, the Committee may need to assess the minister's continued authorization.
- Records need to be updated, including changes such as retirement, change in local church membership, or completed transfer to another Association.
- The basic requirements for continued authorization are not met and authorization is dropped. The Committee should take care to be in contact with the person prior to ending the authorization for ministry.

The Committee on the Ministry typically drops ministerial authorization when any of the following conditions occur:

1. The authorization for ministry has not been appropriately transferred when a person moves to a different Association.
2. The authorized minister resigns his or her authorization as a result of:
 - Withdrawal from the functions of the ministry for which the person is authorized. This may be done at the time the person ceases to perform the ministerial functions or at any point during the period the person has been granted leave of absence.
 - Withdrawal from the United Church of Christ and/or affiliation with another denomination or faith group.
 - The desire to leave the authorized ministries of the United Church of Christ.
 - The authorized minister moves to another denomination or faith group by entering the authorized ministry of that faith group without resigning United Church of Christ ministerial authorization or without approval of the Association to retain United Church of Christ ministerial authorization.
 - The authorized minister is neither actively seeking a call to nor engaged in a ministry for which she or he is authorized and has

not received a leave of absence, resigned her or his authorization, or retired.

- The authorized minister is no longer engaged in the functions of ministry for which he or she is authorized, has had a leave of absence for at least five years consecutively, and has not resigned ministerial authorization. In some cases, the leave of absence may be extended beyond five years, as noted in the leave of absence section related to Ordained Ministerial Standing in *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ* (see appendix).
- The authorized minister, despite repeated effort on the part of the Association, consistently fails to respond to inquiries and communications from the Association, to maintain contact or relationship with the Association, or to otherwise exercise accountability to the Association.

Wherever possible, the ending of ministerial authorization should be accompanied by a pastoral contact by a representative of the Association Committee on the Ministry or a member of the Conference or Association staff. One type of pastoral contact is an exit interview in which the person has an opportunity to reflect on and talk about her or his years of ministry. In addition, this is an opportunity for the Association to learn more about the person's situation in order that it may develop ways to ensure better care for, and support of, its leaders and to prevent the loss of quality persons from the church's ministries that require ecclesiastical authorization.

In addition, the Committee on the Ministry may terminate ministerial authorization if it determines that a person is resigning authorization to avoid a Fitness Review that is imminent, pending, or in process. In this case, the resignation is reported as "resigned while Fitness Review pending." Such a resignation is treated as disciplinary-related and signals future Committees considering a request for reinstatement to explore circumstances surrounding the resignation. The Committee may also terminate ministerial authorization if a person resigns following disciplinary action resulting from a Fitness Review or if the question of fitness is found to have merit and termination of authorization is the final outcome.

RECORD KEEPING

The minutes of the Association Committee on the Ministry should record all actions related to changes in ministerial authorization. The minutes should also indicate the most recent review of ministerial information records.

When the ending of ministerial authorization occurs, it is important for the Association Committee on the Ministry to keep detailed records of the action, noting the reasons why authorization is dropped and anticipating the kind of information that will be important if the person seeks reinstatement at a time in the future. These details should be maintained in the authorized minister's confidential file.

REPORTING

Changes in authorization resulting from an Information Review, including authorizations dropped or terminated, are reported to the covenantal partners, the appropriate Association body, the Conference office, Local Church Ministries, and the Office of General Ministries of the United Church of Christ.

The Association Committee on the Ministry may also report to the appropriate Association body the number of Information Reviews conducted, the process used to conduct the reviews, and the number of authorizations maintained or changed as a result of the reviews.

REINSTATEMENT OF AUTHORIZATION

Reinstatement provides persons who had ministerial authorization the ability to secure it again. Application for reauthorization is made to the Association where the person resides at the time. The Committee on the Ministry in the Association where reinstatement is sought considers the guidance and procedures regarding “Reinstatement of Ordained Ministerial Standing” found within the “Ordained Ministerial Standing” section of the *Manual on Ministry*. Before granting reinstatement of ministerial authorization, the Committee carefully assesses a person’s fitness for ministry, including a thorough check for any disciplinary actions in Associations previously holding authorization.

FITNESS REVIEW

A Fitness Review is a very serious proceeding that involves a reassessment of a person’s fitness for authorized ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ and may result in discipline, including the loss of authorization. For this reason, it is important that a Fitness Review be thorough, providing opportunity for the Association Committee on the Ministry to be fully informed before taking disciplinary action or recommending disciplinary action to the Association.

A thorough review, which ensures fairness to all involved, is equally important when a person’s fitness for ministry is reaffirmed. In this case, the Fitness Review facilitates restoration of confidence in the person’s fitness for ministry in the United Church of Christ.

The purpose of a Fitness Review is to ensure that those who are authorized for ministry in the United Church of Christ carry out that ministry according to the highest ethical standards and that persons are held accountable to the Association that holds their authorization. Authorized ministers are entitled to the protection of a process that is fair and just should their fitness for ministry be called into question.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Before initiating a Fitness Review, Committees on the Ministry should carefully consider the guiding principles outlined on page 13 in this section of *Manual on Ministry*. In addition, the following principles and guidelines help to ensure that a Fitness Review is fair and just.

1. Care must be taken to ensure that a Fitness Review is not being used to address concerns unrelated to a person's fitness for ministry. Issues such as personnel issues, interpersonal conflict, unmet expectations related to the general practice of ministry, or interpersonal relationships that do not indicate inappropriate use of the pastoral office are best addressed in a Situational Support Consultation.
2. As soon as a representative of the Association is made aware of a concern about fitness, prompt response is essential.
3. Neither the chair of the Association Committee on the Ministry, nor a Conference staff person, nor any other individual should ever act alone to determine whether a question of fitness is or is not serious enough to warrant thorough examination through a Fitness Review.
4. All questions about fitness are to be taken seriously and are not to be dismissed without careful review and a response by the Association Committee on the Ministry. In most instances, one or more special meetings of the Association Committee on the Ministry will be needed.
5. The process that an Association has adopted should be followed very carefully.
6. The Association Committee on the Ministry must do careful work to formulate the nature of the fitness concern and ensure all parties affected have ample opportunity to speak to the question at hand.
7. Persons raising questions about an authorized minister's fitness for ministry are to be treated with respect throughout the review. The same high level of respect is extended to the authorized minister whose fitness is being questioned.
8. The Association Committee on the Ministry may itself pursue a concern it has regarding an authorized minister's fitness for ministry, even in the absence of a specific person raising the question of fitness. The Committee may determine that a Fitness Review is called for based on information received from a Conference or Association staff person that raises a question about a person's fitness for ministry, or the Committee may receive the information through other means, such as media reports of criminal or civil suits in process. The Committee on the Ministry must do what it can to ensure that the persons it authorizes are fit for ministry.
9. Once a Fitness Review is underway, the person raising a question about fitness and the person whose fitness is being reviewed should be informed of the procedures that will be used. All parties should have comparable access to information pertinent to the review and should be informed of whom to contact with questions about the process.
10. The Association Committee on the Ministry ensures that no person taking part in the Fitness Review has a potential conflict of interest and that the proceeding minimizes perceptions of bias.

11. Associations are advised against establishing a statute of limitations regarding ministerial fitness. It is not unusual for a concern to be raised about unbecoming behavior that is said to have occurred many years earlier. Several reasons exist for investigating and resolving such issues, regardless of the time that has passed, including:
 - Persons who may have been wronged often need to have their concerns dealt with by a responsible agency or authorizing body as part of their healing.
 - There is a possibility that a pastor who has a history of unethical behavior may repeat that behavior in the future.
 - Information about past behaviors may call into question the authorized minister's current fitness.
12. The leadership of the local church where the authorized minister is a member and the calling body, if other than the local church, must be informed about and involved in the Fitness Review as both are covenantal partners with the person and the Association. Having such information enables these covenantal partners to exercise their responsibilities and roles appropriately.

RESIGNATION

If, in the face of the question regarding fitness for ministry, the person in question resigns her or his ministerial authorization,⁸ the ability of the church to pursue a Fitness Review fully may be thwarted.

Resignation while a Fitness Review is in progress must be reported to the covenantal partners, appropriate Association body, Conference office, Local Church Ministries, and the Office of General Ministries of the United Church of Christ.

The resignation is reported as "resigned while Fitness Review pending" and appears on the person's profile.

A resignation while a Fitness Review is in progress is treated as a disciplinary-related action and signals future Committees considering a request for reinstatement to explore circumstances surrounding the resignation. The Association Committee on the Ministry is encouraged to continue its thorough review, including meeting with the person raising the question regarding fitness, and assemble all relevant documents to the best of its ability. Meeting with the person raising the question is particularly important so that the person feels heard by the church, receives the concern of the church, and is informed that the person will no longer be serving as a United Church of Christ minister. Such meetings can contribute to healing and possible reestablishment of the person's relationship with the church community.

8. It is important to note the distinction between resigning one's ministerial authorization and resigning from a call or place of employment. Persons who resign their authorization no longer minister on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Ministerial authorization is within the purview of the Association, which provides oversight on behalf of the whole United Church of Christ. Persons who resign from a specific position or call from a local church or other calling body retain their ministerial authorization and are subject to all oversight proceedings conducted by the Association.

Even though the authorized minister under review has resigned, it is very important that all records related to the proceedings be kept in a permanent file, where they can be accessed if the person seeks reinstatement of authorization.

PARTICIPATION

A Fitness Review is convened by the Association Committee on the Ministry and includes the authorized minister whose fitness for ministry is called into question, the person raising the question regarding fitness, a representative of the Conference staff, covenantal partners directly involved, and other persons deemed necessary by the Committee. Usually, trained persons from a response team assist the Association Committee on the Ministry in gathering information and providing support. Resources to guide and train response teams are available from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries.

ROLES OF PARTICIPANTS

When a Fitness Review is underway, it is particularly important to give careful consideration to the numerous roles that must be assigned and responsibilities fulfilled. These include but are not limited to:

- Expressing pastoral concern for any persons raising a question regarding an authorized minister's fitness and their families.
- Expressing pastoral concern for the person whose fitness is being reviewed and his or her family.
- Expressing pastoral concern for the local church or other calling body involved.
- Gathering information to enable careful decision-making.
- Coordinating the process to ensure the process adopted by the Association is used to resolve the matter.
- Making a determination about a person's continuing fitness for ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Persons should not be placed in a position where they are asked to carry out multiple roles during the proceeding that could result in actual or perceived bias. For instance, it is impossible to function effectively as both the pastor to the authorized minister whose fitness is being reviewed and as staff to the Committee that investigates and acts on the question raised. Likewise, Committee members cannot assume both pastoral and deliberative roles without undermining the credibility and fairness of the proceeding. After initial contact with all parties involved, it is advisable to have different trained persons or response teams assume responsibility to cover the various roles needed.

The Role of the Committee on the Ministry

The Association Committee on the Ministry has a key role as it:

1. Makes the determination that a Fitness Review is the appropriate oversight proceeding to address the matter at hand.
2. Requests that relevant information be gathered to assist its deliberations.
3. Carefully and prayerfully reviews the information available.
4. Makes a determination about ecclesiastical authorization in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The Association Committee on the Ministry's primary role is to determine whether authorized ministers continue to be fit for the ministry for which they are authorized including:
 - Fulfilling the vows taken at the time of the ordination, commissioning, or licensing.
 - Fulfilling their commitments detailed in the terms of the call to their present ministry and their covenantal relationship with the other partners.
 - Fulfilling the expectations the church has for its ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers as outlined in the charts found in the respective sections of *Manual on Ministry*. These expectations would also apply to persons with privilege of call, ordained ministerial partner standing, and students in care who are moving toward ordination.
 - Conducting their ministry in a manner consistent with the code for the particular ministry for which they have been authorized. The codes for ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers are found in the "Partners in Authorizing Ministry" section of *Manual on Ministry*.
 - Exhibiting knowledge of, appreciation for, and commitment to the faith, history, and polity of the United Church of Christ; the theological identity and practice of the church; and competence in the practice of ministry in and on behalf of the church.

The Association Committee on the Ministry must take care not to assume additional roles as they may compromise its capacity to fulfill these responsibilities.

The Role of Response Teams

Most Associations have established and trained response teams to collect information about a situation and then report that information to the Committee on the Ministry for its deliberation. Some Associations also train pastoral care teams from which pastoral support persons can be drawn. These trained teams of persons supplement the work of the Association Committee on the Ministry by fulfilling specified roles without becoming involved in the deliberation and decision-making process of the Fitness Review.

The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries offers written resources and programs to train persons for service as response team members.

The Role of Conference Staff

When a Fitness Review is in progress, the recommended role of a Conference Minister or Conference staff person is that of coordinating the various functions that have been delegated to other bodies. If one staff person is available, it is recommended that the person serve as staff to the Committee on the Ministry. If two are available, one serves as staff to the Committee and the other serves as a resource to the local church or other calling body.

Conference Ministers and other Conference staff are often expected to be “pastors to pastors.” However, experience has shown that it is not appropriate for a staff person to serve as pastor for either the party raising the fitness concern or the authorized minister under review during the period in which a Fitness Review is underway. It is appropriate for Conference staff to ensure that another person is assigned the role of providing direct pastoral care to the persons involved.

It is appropriate for the Conference Minister or other Conference staff person to contact the authorized minister under review to express the pastoral concern of the church, clarify what the role of the Conference Minister or other staff must be in this circumstance, and encourage the person to use the pastoral support provided by the Conference.

When a Conference Minister, Conference staff person, or a member of her or his family is the subject of a Fitness Review, the Committee on the Ministry checks the policies of the Association and then may confer with the Office of General Ministries to secure counsel regarding this situation.

WHEN TO CONDUCT THE REVIEW

Any time an Association Committee on the Ministry receives information that calls into question an authorized minister’s fitness for ministry, it initiates the first phase of the Fitness Review and follows the process adopted by the Association. The Fitness Review is designed to facilitate the examination of such information and determine whether, in fact, the information derives from a credible source and has merit.

A Fitness Review often begins when a representative of the Association is made aware of information that calls into question a person’s continuing fitness for an authorized ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. This representative may include Association or Conference staff members, members of the Association Committee on the Ministry, members of the Association governing board, and other officers of the Association.

While a question about fitness may surface as the result of a formal written complaint, this is not always so. The Committee may determine that a Fitness Review is called for based on serious concerns and information received from a Conference or Association staff person or the Committee may receive information through other means, such as media reports of criminal or civil suits in process.

Deliberate follow-through, even when the question of fitness does not come in writing, enables the Committee to responsibly address rumor, innuendo, and gossip on behalf of the authorized minister as well as proceed appropriately when a matter has substance.

WAYS TO CONDUCT THE FITNESS REVIEW

The Association Committee on the Ministry always conducts the Fitness Review following the process adopted by the Association. The review typically involves four phases: a preliminary phase, an information-gathering phase, a deliberation and decision phase, and a follow-up phase.

During each of these phases, it is very important that the Association Committee on the Ministry keep careful records, including a simple log of all contacts with key parties as well as an outline of the steps taken to carry out the review. Ultimately a complete outline of the review and outcome, including a summary of all of the questions raised regarding fitness for ministry, details and information considered, the contact log, and all Committee findings, decisions, and actions are placed in the permanent confidential file of the Association.

PRELIMINARY PHASE

Information Surfaces that Calls into Question Fitness for Ministry

A Fitness Review often begins when a representative of the Association or the Association Committee on the Ministry itself is made aware of information that calls into question a person's continuing fitness for an authorized ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Such information may surface through:

1. A person, local church, calling body, or Conference or Association staff person raising a question regarding the fitness of an authorized minister. This information may come from a person directly involved with the authorized minister or from a third party. Such information should be promptly forwarded to both the staff person relating to the Association Committee on the Ministry and the chair of the Committee.
2. One or more members of an Association Committee on the Ministry or the Association Committee on the Ministry itself becoming aware of a situation that may call for a Fitness Review.

The Committee Makes Initial Decision(s)

Since much is at stake when information surfaces that may lead to a Fitness Review, a number of steps need to be taken as quickly as possible. Typically, these steps are carried out by the Association or Conference representative, in collaboration with the chairperson or other representative of the Association Committee on the Ministry, very promptly after receiv-

ing information calling fitness into question. The Association or Conference representative must:

1. Notify secular authorities if the concern raised allegedly involves physical or sexual abuse of a minor and/or adult afforded statutory protection. Typically, the secular authorities conduct their own investigation and follow their own procedures. Activation of civil or criminal procedures need not impede or accelerate the ecclesiastical review process.
2. Notify the full Association Committee on the Ministry regarding the type of information that has surfaced that calls fitness for ministry into question. To introduce the information without bias, the person should not disclose the identities of the authorized minister in question or the person raising the question of fitness. The Committee needs to know only the type of question being raised about a person authorized for ministry so it can determine the appropriate oversight proceeding to consider the matter. In either a face-to-face meeting or a telephone meeting, the Committee needs to determine which of the following options is most consistent with the information it has:
 - Even if found to be true, the information does not call into question the authorized minister's fitness for ministry and does not warrant a Situational Support Consultation. Therefore, no further action is required.
 - Even if found to be true, the information does not call into question the person's fitness for ministry but does point to the need for a Situational Support Consultation. If this is the case, the Committee may move forward to initiate a Situational Support Consultation to address the concern. No further action related to a Fitness Review is required.
 - Additional information is needed in order to determine whether there is a question about fitness for ministry and the Committee directs such information to be gathered.
 - The information, if found to be true, does call into question a person's fitness for continued ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The Association Committee on the Ministry votes to begin a Fitness Review and may request that additional information be gathered on its behalf. The Fitness Review is the appropriate oversight proceeding to use when the matter involves alleged criminal activity, a possible violation of ministerial ethics, or a concern about overall fitness for ministry.

Fitness Review Is Pending

When the Association Committee on the Ministry decides to initiate the Fitness Review, the review is considered to be “pending.” Proceeding with the following steps, some of which may take place simultaneously, the Committee:

1. Confirms that it has formally adopted the Association process for Fitness Review and keeps a record of this action in recorded minutes. Failure to follow the adopted process can jeopardize the integrity of the Fitness Review.
2. Focuses the proceeding on the question raised regarding ministerial fitness and states the nature of the question in a statement that avoids a high degree of detail, since more specific information will be forthcoming. It may be helpful to state the question in language that parallels that found in the ministerial codes or within the expectations the church has for the particular authorization of the person who will be reviewed. The expectations and codes are outlined in the “Partners in Authorizing Ministry,” “Ordained Ministry,” “Commissioned Ministry,” and “Licensed Ministry” sections of *Manual on Ministry*.
3. Takes steps to ensure that no person has a potential conflict of interest or will be placed in a position of multiple roles. Committee members should disclose if they should be excused, with or without discussing the reason. The Committee may also ask a person to step aside, or the individual and the Committee may discuss the circumstance and reach a mutual agreement regarding the individual’s participation. Specific information about conflict of interest and perception of bias is outlined on page 14 in this section of *Manual on Ministry*.
4. Identifies persons who are gifted and able to serve as support persons for each party affected by the fitness question. Often networks or response teams of trained persons within the Conference or Association are able to provide this support. Parties needing support include the person(s) raising the fitness question, the authorized minister under review, and their families. The calling body of the person whose fitness is being questioned also needs support. It is important that different support persons be offered to each party.
5. Communicates with the authorized minister under review, noting that a question about fitness has been raised, stating the general nature of the question, and explaining that a Fitness Review is underway. The Committee describes the process that will be followed and offers pastoral support for the person and his or her family.
6. Communicates with the person raising the question regarding fitness, noting that the Fitness Review is underway. The Committee describes the process that will be followed and offers pastoral support for the person and his or her family.
7. Notifies Local Church Ministries that a Fitness Review is pending involving this particular individual. Local Church Ministries in turn

verifies that this fact is reflected in the individual's profile prior to circulation.

8. Consults with the Conference to clarify who is to serve as staff to the Association Committee on the Ministry. The person providing staff support for the Association Committee on the Ministry should not also provide pastoral support to the authorized minister under review, the person raising the question of fitness, or the local church or other calling body.
9. Identifies a team of two persons to interview the parties involved. Such a team may also be used to gather information on behalf of the Association Committee on the Ministry to help it determine if the question being raised is one of ministerial fitness. Preferably, the team includes a man and a woman, one of whom is an authorized minister and the other a layperson. If there is a large number of parties to be interviewed, more than one team may be assembled. Often networks or teams of trained persons within the Conference or Association are able to serve as response teams in gathering information for the Association Committee on the Ministry.
10. Informs leaders of the local church or other calling body that a question about fitness has been raised about the authorized minister. This initial contact also conveys the general nature of the question, states that a Fitness Review is underway, and describes the process that will be followed. The Committee also notes that a support person will be provided to the local church or other calling body. The Committee also requests an immediate meeting of church leaders.
11. Typically, a representative of the Association Committee on the Ministry or Conference staff and members of the response team meet with the leaders of the local church or other calling body to answer questions and to ensure that all leaders have the same information regarding the Fitness Review. Even at this early stage in the proceeding, it is imperative that the leadership of the calling body be given adequate information to make informed decisions regarding supervision and oversight of those they call or employ as ministers. The leadership of the local church or other calling body is responsible for fostering and nurturing an environment that is equally open and receptive to all who participate in and/or seek the ministry of the church, including those raising questions about a person's fitness and others who may be impacted by the Fitness Review.

It is not uncommon for additional information relevant to the fitness concern to surface during this meeting. While the authorized minister whose fitness is being reviewed should know that this meeting is taking place, neither the authorized minister nor any family members should have any role in setting up, conducting, or attending the meeting.

12. Makes sure the Conference Minister notifies the insurance provider covering the Association and Conference. Usually it is not necessary to provide specific details but rather to establish documenta-

tion so the insurance carrier has received preliminary notice required by the policy.

13. Considers contacting Local Church Ministries and/or other consultants who have extensive experiences with Fitness Reviews for telephone consultations about various procedures for ecclesiastical authorizations and review.

Should the person initially raising the fitness question decide not to participate in the Fitness Review, the Association Committee on the Ministry should continue the review if, based on the information before it, it determines that there is continuing concern about a person's fitness for ministry.

THE INFORMATION-GATHERING PHASE

The purpose of gathering information is to help the Association Committee on the Ministry engage in careful and thorough work as it makes a determination regarding continued fitness for ministry. The information may help to clarify the specific details of the fitness concern, assist the Committee in developing questions to ask the various parties, and help the Committee in its deliberations about the substance of the concern.

The Committee usually gathers information by sending response teams or other trained persons to interview principal parties involved in the review. The response team conducts the interviews, writes summaries of the interviews, and provides opportunity for the persons interviewed to review and make written comments on the summaries. These interview summaries are then provided to the Association Committee on the Ministry. Guidelines for training response teams to gather information are available from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries.

Information is typically gathered from:

1. The person raising the question of fitness. This person may write a formal letter to the Association Committee on the Ministry outlining the specific concerns about fitness. In some cases, the Committee may determine that it needs information in addition to that provided in the letter to determine the full extent of the concern and to determine whether the concern does affect fitness for ministry. The Committee may then send a response team to secure additional information from this person or other sources. In other cases, the information provided in the letter may be sufficient for the Committee to proceed. If the preliminary information is not received in writing, the Committee may still proceed.
2. Other persons having information regarding the concern that has been raised about the authorized minister's fitness for ministry.
3. The authorized minister under review. A response team asks this person for her or his perspective and response to information presented at this time. The person is entitled access to the content of what is being said about her or him, and by whom, so she or he can adequately respond, in writing if desired. Summarized accounts that have been compiled by the response team may be one means of sharing this information. The authorized minister under review

should not have actual written or taped information offered by other parties, but should be able to review, although not retain, any summarized documents.

4. The local church or other calling body.
5. Public records or media reports. In some instances, the Association Committee on the Ministry may be aware of civil or criminal charges against an authorized minister and asks the response team to gather information from public records or media reports.
6. Experts or others with specialized knowledge. It is not unusual for the Association Committee on the Ministry to request psychiatric assessments, financial audits, or evaluations from other experts pertinent to the question being raised to help inform the Committee's deliberation and decisions.

The Committee Reviews Information

The Association Committee on the Ministry meets to receive the information gathered, which may include copies of written letters speaking to the concern about fitness, interview summaries with principal parties, and any other relevant documentation.

Usually, the Committee on the Ministry meets with those who have gathered the information and solicits their clarification on materials offered and perceptions regarding the question at hand. In some cases, the Committee may request additional information before it proceeds.

Once all information is reviewed, the Committee on the Ministry develops a plan to meet with the persons directly involved in the review. The Committee discusses:

1. What specifically are the concerns about fitness? The Committee should prepare a concise summary of the questions that are being pursued in the Fitness Review and be prepared to share this summary with persons invited to participate in an upcoming meeting not longer than one week from the information gathering.
2. Who are the principal parties who should be offered an opportunity to speak directly to the Association Committee on the Ministry? Typically these include the authorized minister whose fitness is being reviewed, persons directly raising a question about fitness, and other parties having information that directly impacts the matter.
3. How will the Committee provide opportunity for the various parties to be heard by the Committee?
4. Based on the information available to the Committee at this time, what questions does the Committee have for the various parties that may help the Committee in its deliberation regarding fitness for ministry?

The Committee Meets with the Parties

Meetings held by the Association Committee on the Ministry after the information-gathering provide an opportunity for those persons most directly involved with the question of a person's fitness for ministry to speak directly to the Committee.

The Committee notifies the primary parties that the meeting will include and the records will reflect:

1. Written statements by the Association Committee on the Ministry outlining the Fitness Review process followed, noting the process as one adopted by the Association, stating the purpose of the meeting, stating the nature and specific details of the question of fitness being raised, logging Committee activities to date, and summarizing Committee actions to date. These statements need to be very specific and include dates related to activities and actions.
2. A presentation raising the concern about continued fitness for ministry. This often includes the presence of persons or representatives of the persons raising the fitness question. It may include calling additional persons to present information and perspectives addressing the question of fitness. In some instances, one or more members of the Association Committee on the Ministry may present a statement.
3. A presentation in support of fitness for ministry. Usually, this includes having the authorized minister under review present her or his perspectives. It may include having the person in question provide information pertinent to the concerns raised or calling additional persons to present information from their perspectives that address the question of fitness.

The written statements by the Association Committee on the Ministry are provided to the primary parties no later than one week prior to the meeting, so the parties can adequately prepare for the meeting.

When the Association Committee on the Ministry itself raises the question about the person's fitness for ministry, special care is needed to ensure fairness to the person and the church. In such cases, it may be best if a subgroup of the Committee or a specially appointed group made up of non-Committee members gives the presentation regarding continued fitness for ministry in order to leave the Association Committee on the Ministry as objective and fair as possible.

Every effort is made to notify the authorized minister and secure his or her presence and participation in this meeting with the Association Committee on the Ministry. A registered letter may be sent to accomplish this. If the person in question refuses to meet with the Committee or participate in the Fitness Review, the Committee on the Ministry should proceed and determine an outcome regarding the person's ministerial authorization without benefit of the information the person may have provided.

Typically, a party raising a concern about fitness and the person whose fitness is being questioned are permitted to have others participate in the meeting with the Association Committee on the Ministry. These persons

are invited to present information that speaks directly to the fitness question under consideration for a specified amount of time determined in advance of the meeting. These persons should be identified prior to the meeting. The Committee has the authority to limit the number of persons speaking and uphold the designated time limits.

Sometimes the person whose fitness for ministry is being reviewed and the person raising the fitness question request to have an attorney present during the meeting phase of the Fitness Review. Care should be taken to explain that there is no role for attorneys in ecclesiastical proceedings. While persons are free to engage legal counsel, federal and state constitutional jurisprudence makes clear that governmental bodies, including officers of the court, cannot interfere with a church's responsibility for determining who can and cannot minister on its behalf. If the Committee allows an attorney to be present, the attorney must be informed that she or he may sit and listen as her or his client presents information or responds to questions from the Committee, but the attorney may not make the presentation, question any participant in the Fitness Review process, represent her or his client, or participate in the meeting in any way. The attorney is dismissed from the meeting when her or his client is not present.

While careful records have been kept thus far in the Fitness Review, it is especially important that detailed information regarding this meeting and subsequent decisions of the Committee be recorded and secured.

Some Committees choose to meet individually with each principal person making a presentation, while others choose to conduct the meeting with all parties present at the same time. All parties offering information must have a timely opportunity to respond to any information shared with the Committee regarding them. However, it is important to remember that persons have not been asked to meet with the Committee in order to seek reconciliation or have a face-to-face confrontation between the parties. Rather, persons must have an opportunity to offer information directly to the Committee and to hear its response. In-person meetings also provide an opportunity for the Committee to know the source of the information cited.

The following agenda for this meeting may be used or adapted by the Association Committee on the Ministry:

1. Prayer requesting God's presence, spiritual guidance in discerning the matter before the Committee, and expressing divine care and concern for all who participate.
2. Statement of the role of the Association Committee on the Ministry in ecclesiastical matters. The church seeks to address issues of fitness for ministry for ordained, commissioned, or licensed ministers of the United Church of Christ. The responsibility and authority delegated to the Association Committee on the Ministry by the Association is stated clearly.
3. Introduction of persons participating and their roles in the meeting.
4. Statement about how the meeting will be conducted.
5. Reading of the questions that have been raised about the person's fitness for ministry.

6. Presentation of information that questions fitness. This normally would be offered by persons who have pertinent information about the fitness concern. A specific amount of time should be allocated for this step. The number of persons providing information may be limited.
7. Presentation of information responding to the specific questions raised. This normally would be offered by the person under review and persons that she or he has secured to offer information or perspectives on the fitness question. A specific amount of time should be allocated for this step comparable to the time allowed for the presentation of the fitness question. The number of persons providing information may be limited.
8. Opportunity for those raising the concern to respond to the information presented by the authorized minister.
9. Opportunity for the authorized minister under review to respond to the information presented by those representing the concern about ministerial fitness.
10. Questions from the Association Committee on the Ministry to any of those offering information and perspectives.
11. Concluding statement by those representing the concern about ministerial fitness.
12. Concluding statement by the person whose fitness for ministry is in question.
13. Prayer for continued guidance and comfort for those involved in the situation and for those who must make a decision about the person's continued fitness for ministry.
14. Dismissal of all except the Association Committee on the Ministry.

DELIBERATION AND DECISION PHASE

If the Association Committee on the Ministry has been authorized to act on behalf of the Association in providing oversight, proceed with Option A. In those cases where the Committee examines the persons and makes a recommendation to the Association governing board for final action, proceed with Option B.

Option A: Decision by the Association Committee on the Ministry

The Association Committee on the Ministry considers all of the information and determines:

1. Were the specific concerns found to have merit, and what is the rationale for this decision?
2. Is this person currently fit for ministry in the United Church of Christ?
3. Based on the Committee's faithful deliberation, what outcome is discerned to be appropriate? The Committee decides from among

the available outcomes for a Fitness Review described on pages 47 to 51 in this section of *Manual of Ministry*.

The decision of the Committee is written with sensitivity and clarifies the decision on behalf of the whole church.

The Association Committee on the Ministry, or one of its members, and a Conference staff member representing the Committee make every effort to meet with the authorized minister under review to communicate and interpret the Committee's decision, to relate pastorally to the person, and to seek reconciliation in the situation. The Committee also offers to meet with those who raised the fitness question to communicate and interpret its decision, to relate to them pastorally, and to seek reconciliation. The decision is also communicated to the local church or other calling body.

The Committee also needs to share information regarding appeal of the process to all interested persons. Specific guidelines for the appeal process are found on pages 10 to 12 and page 51 in this section of *Manual on Ministry*.

Option B: Decision by the Association Governing Board or other designated body upon Recommendation of the Association Committee on the Ministry

The Association Committee on the Ministry considers all of the information and determines:

1. Were the specific concerns found to have merit, and what is the rationale for this decision?
2. Is this person currently fit for ministry in the United Church of Christ?
3. Based on the Committee's faithful deliberation, what outcome is discerned to be appropriate? The Committee decides from among the available outcomes for a Fitness Review.

The recommendation of the Committee is written with sensitivity and clarifies the recommendation on behalf of the whole church. The Association Committee on the Ministry presents its recommended outcome to the governing board or other designated body of the Association.

Prior to considering the Committee's recommendation, the Association needs to spend a considerable period of time orienting those voting on the recommendation about Association processes and policies, the task of the governing board or other designated body, and pertinent legal and ethical implications of their work. It is recommended that written copies of the process adopted by the Association be provided to each voting member.

Care needs to be taken to ensure that the decision process does not become a means by which persons or the work of the Association Committee on the Ministry are disregarded or are treated unfairly. It should be made clear to the body considering the recommendation that its task is not to repeat the deliberative process of the Committee but to assure that the process used was consistent with the process adopted by the Association.

Only registered voting delegates may participate in this meeting, and every person who has a vote regarding the recommendation must be present for

the entire time during which the recommendation is being considered. Members of the Association Committee on the Ministry may not participate as members of the body during consideration of the recommendation. These provisions are especially important in those Associations where an appeal is heard by the entire Association meeting in an ecclesiastical council.

The Committee should work with the Association governing board or other designated body to adopt an agenda that assures fairness as the body makes its decision.

The agenda could include the following:

1. Prayer requesting God's presence, spiritual guidance in discerning the matter before the body, and expressing divine care and concern for all who participate.
2. A review of the process followed, clarification that the process was one adopted by the Association, and recommendation of the Association Committee on the Ministry.
3. An opportunity for the person under review to make a statement. The statement focuses on the process used.
4. An opportunity for any person raising the concern about fitness to make a statement. The statement focuses on the process used.
5. An opportunity for the Association Committee on the Ministry to offer a statement in response to issues raised by the authorized minister or the person(s) raising the fitness question.
6. An opportunity for those who are voting to ask questions to clarify the information presented or to ascertain information needed to act on the recommendation, specifically regarding the procedures used by the Association Committee on the Ministry during the review.
7. Dismissal of all parties except the Association governing board or other designated body.
8. The Association governing board or other designated body acts on the recommendation of the Association Committee on the Ministry. In most instances, the body accepts the recommendation of the Association Committee on the Ministry. In rare instances, the body may select an outcome other than the one recommended by the Association Committee on the Ministry. When this is considered, the body meets with the Committee on the Ministry to discuss the basis on which another outcome is being considered and to ensure that all relevant information has been shared.

A representative of the Association and/or a Conference staff member makes every effort to meet with the person under review to communicate and interpret the decision, to relate pastorally to the person, and to seek reconciliation in the situation. The same party also offers to meet with those who raised the fitness question to communicate and interpret its decision, to relate to them pastorally, and to seek reconciliation. The decision is also communicated to the local church or other calling body.

OUTCOMES

The Association may choose from among six outcomes. Two of these outcomes affirm the person's continued authorization and four are disciplinary actions. In making its decision or recommendation regarding disciplinary actions, the Association Committee on the Ministry should take into account the person's repentance, the probability of rehabilitation and restoration of the person to fitness for ministry, the impact on the persons who have been harmed by the authorized minister, and the possibility of future behaviors by the authorized minister that may be harmful to others.

Reaffirmation of Fitness

The person's current fitness for ministry is reaffirmed. This is an appropriate outcome when the specific concerns were unfounded or unsupported by the information available to the Committee.

In the view of the Association, the person continues to be fit for ministry. There are no restrictions or conditions placed upon the person's exercise of ministry and the person is fully restored to ministry.

When this is the outcome, recognizing the harm that an unfounded accusation can cause, appropriate public notice needs to be given and pastoral support provided to the person and her or his family. The Association Committee on the Ministry takes care to communicate the Reaffirmation of Fitness to the local church or other calling body so that it can offer an appropriate response.

The Association also needs to report this decision immediately to the covenantal partners, appropriate Association body, Conference office, and Local Church Ministries. Local Church Ministries promptly removes the "Fitness Review pending" notification from the person's profile.

Referral to a Situational Support Consultation

The person's current fitness for ministry is affirmed unconditionally, and the concern is referred to a Situational Support Consultation. There may be occasions when an Association Committee on the Ministry conducts a Fitness Review and, after examining all of the information, finds that the concern is not one that calls into question the person's fitness for ministry but is a concern more appropriately addressed in a Situational Support Consultation.

In the view of the Association, the person continues to be fit for ministry. There are no conditions or restrictions placed upon the person's exercise of ministry and the person is fully restored to ministry. The person is offered the support and nurture of a Situational Support Consultation to address any remaining concerns.

Referral to a Situational Support Consultation is not a disciplinary action, and the person's continued fitness for ministry needs to be widely communicated. The Association Committee on the Ministry takes care to communicate the referral to a Situational Support Consultation to the local church or other calling body, so that it can offer an appropriate response.

The Association also needs to report this decision immediately to the appropriate Association body, Conference office, and Local Church Ministries. Local Church Ministries promptly removes the “Fitness Review pending” notification from the person’s profile.

Conditional Affirmation of Fitness with a Prescribed Program of Growth

The person’s current fitness for ministry is affirmed if the following conditions are met. The decision of the Association could be that the specific concern brought before the Committee had some merit and that the person continues to be fit for ministry as long as the conditions outlined are met. A plan for the growth and development of the person in his or her ministry is developed to improve an aspect of ministry determined to be weak or inadequate. Conditional affirmation of fitness and a program of growth may accompany actions of censure or suspension. Following a designated period of time determined by the Committee, the Committee evaluates the authorized minister’s compliance with, and progress regarding, all outlined conditions.

As a term of continued authorization, the authorized minister is required to sign an understanding of the terms and conditions of the conditional affirmation of fitness with a prescribed program of growth. The person is also required to sign a release permitting the communication of the Fitness Review outcome to future or prospective employers as terms of continued authorization. Failure to sign or comply with these two documents constitutes a basis for termination of ministerial authorization.

Conditional affirmation of fitness with a prescribed program of growth is a disciplinary action and therefore becomes part of the person’s permanent record. The Association Committee on the Ministry takes care to communicate this conditional affirmation to the local church or other calling body, so that it can offer an appropriate response.

The Association also needs to report this decision immediately to the appropriate Association body, Conference office, and Local Church Ministries. Local Church Ministries reports the conditional affirmation of fitness with a prescribed program of growth on the person’s profile as a disciplinary action resulting from a Fitness Review.

Censure

The person’s current fitness for ministry is affirmed but the Committee recognizes that behavior unbecoming the ministries of the United Church of Christ has occurred. The person is censured. Censure is an official statement by an Association of the church’s disapproval of a behavior as unbecoming one who has been authorized for ministry by the United Church of Christ. This is an appropriate outcome when, in the decision of the Committee, the specific concern was found to have merit. In most cases, the Committee also determines that the behavior that led to the censure will not be repeated, and that therefore the person is deemed to be fit to continue the practice of ministry.

A growth program may or may not be prescribed as part of a censure. When a growth program is developed, the Committee evaluates the authorized minister's compliance with, and progress regarding, the program of growth after a designated period of time determined by the Committee.

Censure is offered as a warning, indicating that further similar conduct is unacceptable and could lead to suspension or termination of the person's authorization for ministry. In addition, failure to comply or satisfactorily complete a required program of growth may also result in suspension or termination of the person's authorization for ministry.

As a term of continued authorization, the authorized minister is required to sign an understanding of the terms and conditions of the censure including any program of growth. The person is also required to sign a release permitting the communication of the Fitness Review outcome to any future or prospective employers as terms of continued authorization. Failure to sign or comply with these two documents constitutes a basis for termination of ministerial authorization.

Censure is a disciplinary action and therefore becomes part of the person's permanent record. The Association Committee on the Ministry takes care to communicate the censure to the local church or other calling body, so that it can offer an appropriate response.

The Association also needs to report this decision immediately to the appropriate Association body, Conference office, and Local Church Ministries. Local Church Ministries reports the censure on the person's profile as a disciplinary action resulting from a Fitness Review.

Suspension

The concern about this person's present fitness for ministry is sustained and authorization for ministry is suspended. The Association determines that the person is not fit for ministry at the present time, but authorization may be restored at some time in the future should certain conditions be met. Suspension is for a period of time in order to implement a program of growth developed by the Association, to allow time for compliance with other conditions imposed by the Committee, and/or to underscore the seriousness of the offense.

The suspension should clearly state what period of time it is in effect and outline conditions that must be met in order for consideration to be given to lifting the suspension after the designated period of time. The person is required to sign an understanding of the terms and conditions of the suspension.

The person is also required to sign a release permitting the communication of the Fitness Review outcome to future or prospective employers as terms of continued authorization. Failure to sign and comply with these two documents constitutes a basis for termination of ministerial authorization.

Suspension, while not permanently removing the person's ministerial authorization, removes the rights and privileges of the authorization until the situation is resolved and authorization is restored. While suspended, the person cannot perform the functions of the ministry for which she or he

has been authorized. The person is also ineligible to circulate a ministerial profile or participate in the search and call process of the United Church of Christ until the suspension is removed. The Association Committee on the Ministry takes care to communicate with the local church or other calling body regarding the specific conditions of the suspension and the implications of the suspension for the calling body.

Following the designated period of suspension determined by the Association Committee on the Ministry, the Committee evaluates the person's compliance with all outlined conditions and readiness to resume the practice of ministry. At that time, the Association Committee on the Ministry may lift the suspension, continue the suspension, or terminate authorization.

Suspension is a disciplinary action and therefore becomes part of the person's permanent record. The Association also needs to report this decision immediately to the appropriate Association body, Conference office, Local Church Ministries, and the Office of General Ministries of the United Church of Christ. Local Church Ministries reports the suspension on the person's profile as a disciplinary action resulting from a Fitness Review.

Termination

The person is determined to be unfit for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and authorization for ministry is terminated. This action typically indicates that in the view of the Association, the concern was found to have merit, the person is not deemed fit for ministry at the present time, and in the view of the Association, is unlikely to be found fit in the foreseeable future.

Termination is a disciplinary action and therefore becomes part of the person's permanent record. The Association Committee on the Ministry takes care to communicate the termination and its implications to the local church or other calling body.

The Association also needs to report this decision immediately to the appropriate Association body, Conference office, Local Church Ministries, and the Office of General Ministries of the United Church of Christ. Local Church Ministries reports the termination on the person's profile as a disciplinary action resulting from a Fitness Review.

THE FOLLOW-UP PHASE

While recognizing that a Fitness Review takes a considerable amount of time and effort from all those involved, important issues need attention even after an outcome has been determined.

Signed Documents

In the case of a conditional affirmation, censure, or suspension, the authorized minister and a representative of the Association Committee on the Ministry sign a statement of understanding—a written document outlining a program of rehabilitation and other conditions related to the Committee's action so that all parties understand and acknowledge the conditions set

forth. The person is required to sign this understanding as a term of continued authorization. Failure to sign or comply with this statement of understanding constitutes a basis for termination of ministerial authorization.

The authorized minister also is required to sign a release permitting the communication of the Fitness Review outcome to future or prospective employers as terms of continued authorization. Failure to sign this release constitutes a basis for termination of ministerial authorization.

Requests for an Appeal

If there is a means of appeal, review the commentary on appeal on pages 10 to 12 in this section of *Manual on Ministry*. It is very important that the Association follow its adopted process when hearing an appeal of a Fitness Review. The following guidelines should also be considered in planning the agenda for the appeal:

- Prior to the gathering, delegate requirements must be determined by consulting the bylaws of the Association. The bylaw provisions also make provision for ecclesiastical matters to be delegated to designated bodies.
- Delegates must be registered in advance to provide a list of registered official delegates to be present at the meeting.
- Only official registered delegates are permitted at the meeting, and they must sign in.
- Only signed-in, registered, official delegates who have been present for the entire meeting are allowed to vote. Delegates are notified in advance of the need to be present for the entire meeting.
- Ballots for the vote are distributed only immediately prior to the vote.
- Several hours of educational process, both about the issue regarding fitness for ministry and the process adopted for use by the Association precede consideration of the appeal. The educational process includes a review of the provisions for appeal that have been adopted by the Association. Particular attention should be given to the Association's provisions regarding what decisions are subject to appeal, the grounds or basis upon which a matter may be appealed, who may file an appeal, what body hears an appeal, the process to hear an appeal, and the possible outcomes of the appeal.
- The person(s) raising the question regarding fitness, the authorized minister whose fitness for ministry is under review, and leaders of the local church or other calling body involved may not be present at the meeting except for the time on the agenda when they may be invited to address the body.
- If one of the parties is permitted to address the Association governing board, the other parties should be invited to do so as well.

A suggested agenda for an appeal of an Association Committee on the Ministry Action includes:

1. Prayer requesting God's presence, spiritual guidance in discerning the matter before the appeal board, and expressing divine care and concern for all who will participate.
2. A review of the provisions for appeal, including the process and agenda to be followed.
3. An opportunity for an education process that reviews the adopted policies and procedures to be followed by the Committee on the Ministry in conducting a Fitness Review and, as well, information about the issue at hand.
4. An opportunity for the Committee on the Ministry to outline the process and procedures used by the Committee as it conducted the Fitness Review.
5. An opportunity for the person filing the appeal to make a statement. The statement should address the ways in which the person believes the Committee on the Ministry failed to follow the policies and procedures of the Association.
6. An opportunity for the Committee on the Ministry to offer a statement in response to issues raised by the person filing the appeal.
7. An opportunity for those who are voting to ask questions to clarify the information presented or to ascertain information needed to act on the recommendation. However, it is not the purpose of the Association appeal body to reexamine the information, but rather to determine whether or not the process used by the Committee on the Ministry during the review was consistent with the one adopted by the Association.
8. The Committee on the Ministry and the person filing the appeal are dismissed during the deliberation phase of the body hearing the appeal.
9. The appeal body determines whether or not the process used was consistent with the one adopted for use by the Association. If the process was consistent, the appeal is denied. If the process was not consistent, the appeal is sustained. The body directs the Association Committee on the Ministry to reconsider its action following the adopted process, policies, and procedures of the Association.

RECORD KEEPING

The minutes of a Fitness Review should contain a record of all decisions and actions determined by the Association Committee on the Ministry related to the Fitness Review. At a minimum, the minutes should record the following decisions:

1. The decision of the Committee to initiate a Fitness Review.
2. The statement of the Committee regarding the nature of the concern that has prompted the review.

3. The finding of the Committee as to whether the concern raised was found to have merit or a basis in fact.
4. The decision of the Committee or Association regarding the person's fitness for ministry.
5. The outcomes or actions determined by the Committee or Association in light of its previous decisions.

Other actions taken by the Committee may also be recorded in the minutes, including a decision to seek psychiatric or other expert opinion, a decision to inform and or consult with other covenantal partners, or other actions taken. The minutes of the Fitness Review are the public record of the proceeding.

In some instances, there may be more than one specific concern that is reviewed. Committees on the Ministry are encouraged to list each concern separately, and repeat the kinds of information needed for the minutes. Some Committees may elect to indicate the number of Committee members voting on a particular item.

Care also needs to be taken to ensure appropriate safeguards for the privacy and confidentiality of the proceeding. Therefore, the details and information that informed each of the decisions and actions of the Committee are not included in the minutes, but rather are maintained in the Association's confidential files. A complete outline of the Fitness Review and outcome, including a summary of all questions raised, details and information considered, the contact log, and Committee findings, are placed in the permanent confidential file of the Association. It is important to remember the purpose of a confidential file is to secure the files from inappropriate or unauthorized disclosure, but that its contents can and may be made available under appropriate and specifically authorized circumstances. More information regarding confidentiality is detailed on page 15.

If the outcome includes disciplinary action, steps are taken to ensure that this becomes a permanent part of the individual's record and must be reported on the person's profile. Disciplinary actions include: conditional affirmation of fitness with prescribed program of growth, censure, suspension, and termination. Reaffirmation of Fitness and Referral to a Situational Support Consultation are not considered to be disciplinary outcomes.

REPORTING

The Association Committee on the Ministry notifies Local Church Ministries when a Fitness Review is pending so that the individual's profile is changed immediately to reflect this fact.

The outcome of a Fitness Review is reported to the appropriate Association body, the Conference office, and to Local Church Ministries. If no disciplinary action is taken—Reaffirmation of Fitness or referral to a Situational Support Consultation—the information that a Fitness Review is pending is promptly removed from the individual's profile. If the outcome includes disciplinary action, Local Church Ministries appropriately circulates the report of the outcome throughout the United Church of Christ ecclesiastical system. Suspensions or terminations of authorization are also reported to the Office of General Ministries as changes in ministerial authorization.

When reporting the outcomes of a Fitness Review as well as filing the permanent record of the proceeding, it is helpful to:

1. Name each specific question regarding fitness for ministry.
2. Indicate whether each question regarding fitness was, in the determination of the Association Committee on the Ministry, found to have merit.
3. Indicate whether, in the determination of the Association Committee on the Ministry, the person continues to be fit for ministry.
4. List any other factors considered by the Association Committee on the Ministry in determining the outcome—repentant nature of the person, likelihood of being restored to fitness for ministry, or the likelihood of problematic behavior being repeated.
5. Name the outcome.

PASTORAL ISSUES

Fitness Reviews happen infrequently in the life of the church and are difficult, painful, and stress-producing experiences for all involved. Regardless of the outcome of this oversight proceeding, a host of pastoral work remains to be done upon its conclusion. Care must be expressed for all parties, including the families of the person raising the fitness question, the authorized minister reviewed, and the local church or other calling body. The Association Committee on the Ministry should work collaboratively with the appropriate parties in the Association to ensure the pastoral concern of the church is offered during and following the conclusion of the Fitness Review.

A Fitness Review also has a considerable impact on those involved in conducting it, including members of the Association Committee on the Ministry, the response team, those who provide support to the participants, and the Conference staff. Some Associations have found it helpful to provide an opportunity for these parties to gather with a resource person who can facilitate a debriefing of, and reflection on, the impact of the Fitness Review following its conclusion. In situations where this review has become particularly controversial or adversarial, the Conference may consider offering ongoing pastoral support for persons involved in conducting the review.

REINSTATEMENT OF AUTHORIZATION

The procedures for reinstatement of ministerial authorization are outlined in the “Ordained Ministerial Standing” and “Commissioning” sections of *Manual on Ministry*. Licensed ministers are not technically eligible for reinstatement, although persons may be issued a new license to practice ministry if they are qualified. In considering a person’s application for a new license, the Association Committee on the Ministry may be guided by the comments and guidance for reinstatement of ordained ministerial standing or a commission.

When considering reinstatement, the Association Committee on the Ministry needs to consider:

1. The perspective of those who may have been harmed by the authorized minister's behavior.
2. Pending civil or criminal legal action.
3. Progress in treatment or compliance with any outlined conditions.
4. Degree to which responsibility for past actions is acknowledged.
5. Signed agreement that there will be full disclosure in future ministry settings.
6. A pattern of repeat offenses often occurs regarding many forms of misconduct. This calls for very serious questioning of any practice that resolves an actual incidence of misconduct without disciplinary action and/or removal of the person from the practice of authorized ministry. Authorization to return to ministry should follow an extensive examination of repentance, forgiveness, treatment, and rehabilitation resulting in an informed decision that the person again meets the church's requirements for fitness.

The church is called to practice justice and forgiveness, but it is not required to authorize persons for ministry who have demonstrated inability to uphold the behaviors and responsibilities the ministerial role requires. The church may forgive persons and restore them to the community of the church, but not return them to the practice of authorized ministry if the person could pose a risk to the safety of others or compromise the faithful witness of the church.

A CHART SUMMARIZING THE PROCEDURE FOR A FITNESS REVIEW

Procedures for the Minister under Review	Procedures for Those Raising the Fitness Concern	Procedures for the Association or Committee on the Ministry	Procedures for Association or Committee Representatives
	<p>A person provides information that, if true, calls into question someone's continuing fitness for an authorized ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.</p>	<p>A Committee on the Ministry is made aware of information that, if true, calls into question someone's continuing fitness for an authorized ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.</p>	<p>A representative of the Association or the Committee on the Ministry is made aware of information that, if true, calls into question someone's continuing fitness for an authorized ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.</p>
			<p>The Association or Conference representative, in collaboration with the chairperson or other representative of the Committee on the Ministry, notifies the full Committee on the Ministry regarding the type of information that has surfaced that may call fitness for ministry into question.</p>
		<p>The Committee meets to review the information and, if appropriate, take action to initiate a Fitness Review.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if judged to be true, the information does not call into question the minister's fitness for ministry and no further action is required. • Even if judged to be true, the information does not call into question the minister's fitness for ministry but does point to the need for a Situational Support Consultation. The Committee may initiate a Situational Support Consultation to address the concern. 	

A CHART SUMMARIZING THE PROCEDURE FOR A FITNESS REVIEW

Procedures for the Minister under Review	Procedures for Those Raising the Fitness Concern	Procedures for the Association or Committee on the Ministry	Procedures for Association or Committee Representatives
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional information is needed in order to determine whether there is a question about fitness for ministry and the Committee directs such information to be gathered. • The information, if found to be true, raises a question regarding a person's fitness for continued ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The Committee on the Ministry votes to begin a Fitness Review and may request that additional information be gathered on its behalf. 	
		The Committee notifies Local Church Ministries that a Fitness Review is pending involving this particular individual.	
		The Committee determines if any Committee member may be perceived to have a conflict of interest and therefore should not participate in the Fitness Review.	
		The Committee reviews the process and procedure to be followed.	
		The Committee clearly states the subject of the Fitness Review based on the initial information available.	
		The Committee consults with the Conference to clarify who will serve as staff to the Committee on the Ministry.	The Conference identifies a person to provide staff support for the Committee on the Ministry.

A CHART SUMMARIZING THE PROCEDURE FOR A FITNESS REVIEW

Procedures for the Minister under Review	Procedures for Those Raising the Fitness Concern	Procedures for the Association or Committee on the Ministry	Procedures for Association or Committee Representatives
			A representative of the Committee identifies different persons to serve as support persons for each party affected by the fitness question.
			A representative of the Committee identifies a team of persons to interview the parties involved.
<p>The person learns</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. that a Fitness Review has been initiated, 2. that support services are available, and 3. that he or she will be contacted by representatives of the Committee on the Ministry for the purpose of sharing more information and providing an opportunity for the person to share his or her perspective on the issue at hand. 	<p>The person is notified</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. that the Committee on the Ministry has reviewed the information originally provided by the person, 2. that a Fitness Review has been initiated, 3. that support services are available, 4. and that he or she will be contacted by representatives of the Committee on the Ministry for the purpose of sharing more information and providing an opportunity for the person to share his or her perspective on the issue at hand. 		<p>A representative of the Committee communicates with the parties to be interviewed, noting that</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a question about fitness has been raised, 2. offering the services of support persons, and 3. informing them that they will be contacted by representatives of the Committee whose task it is to meet with them individually and hear their perspective on the issue at hand.
<p>The person decides whether to make use of the support person offered by the Committee on the Ministry.</p>	<p>The person decides whether to make use of the support person offered by the Committee on the Ministry.</p>		<p>Support persons for each of the parties make initial contact to arrange for providing support services.</p>
<p>The person meets the representatives of the Committee and shares his or her perspective and information on the question at hand.</p> <p>The person's support person may also be present for the interview.</p>	<p>The person meets the representatives of the Committee and shares his or her perspective and information on the question at hand.</p> <p>The person's support person may also be present for the interview.</p>		<p>The representatives of the Committee on the Ministry gathers information needed for the Committee's deliberations.</p>

A CHART SUMMARIZING THE PROCEDURE FOR A FITNESS REVIEW

Procedures for the Minister under Review	Procedures for Those Raising the Fitness Concern	Procedures for the Association or Committee on the Ministry	Procedures for Association or Committee Representatives
			<p>Representatives of the Committee on the Ministry contact leaders of the local church or other calling body to inform the body that a Fitness Review is underway. Representatives of the local church or calling body with responsibility for oversight of the call and/or personnel matters are informed of the nature of the fitness concerns, alerted to any temporary employment related decisions they must consider, and receive updates on the process being utilized.</p>
		<p>The Committee on the Ministry meets to receive the information gathered. The Committee may solicit clarification from those who gathered the information.</p>	<p>The representatives who gathered the information on behalf of the Committee on the Ministry meet with the Committee to report on the information gathered.</p>
		<p>Upon receiving and considering the information, the Committee on the Ministry decides to move forward to the meeting phase of the process or asks that additional information be gathered.</p>	<p>If necessary, the representatives gather additional information either from the principle parties or from additional witnesses or other sources.</p>
		<p>Upon moving into the meeting phase, and based upon the information before it, the Committee prepares a concise summary of the questions that are being pursued in the Fitness Review.</p>	
		<p>The Committee identifies principal parties to be given an opportunity to be</p>	

A CHART SUMMARIZING THE PROCEDURE FOR A FITNESS REVIEW

Procedures for the Minister under Review	Procedures for Those Raising the Fitness Concern	Procedures for the Association or Committee on the Ministry	Procedures for Association or Committee Representatives
<p>The minister in question is given an opportunity to meet with the Committee to hear and respond to the allegations and concerns raised concerning her or his fitness for ministry.</p> <p>The person's support person may also be present for the meeting.</p>	<p>The person is given an opportunity to meet with the Committee to share the allegation and information she or he may have regarding the person's fitness for ministry.</p> <p>The person's support person may also be present for the meeting.</p>	<p>directly heard by the Committee.</p> <p>The Committee on the Ministry meets with the principal parties to provide opportunity for those persons most directly involved with the question of a person's fitness for ministry to be heard directly by the Committee on the Ministry.</p>	<p>Support persons for both the minister and also for the person raising the fitness concern may be present to provide support when the respective party meets with the Committee.</p>
		<p>OPTION A: Adjudication by the Committee on the Ministry.⁹</p> <p>The Committee on the Ministry considers all of the information and makes its decisions. The Committee determines:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the judgment of the Committee, were the specific allegations or concerns founded? 2. In the judgment of the Committee, is this person currently fit for ministry in the United Church of Christ? 3. In light of the Committee's response to questions one and two, what outcome is appropriate? The Committee decides from among the available outcomes for a Fitness Review. 	
		<p>OPTION B: Adjudication by the Association Governing Board or Ecclesiastical Council upon recommendation of the Committee on the Ministry.</p>	

9. If the Committee on the Ministry has been authorized to act on behalf of the Association in providing oversight, proceed with Option A. In those cases where the committee examines the person and makes a recommendation to the Association Governing Board or an Ecclesiastical Council for final action, proceed with Option B.

A CHART SUMMARIZING THE PROCEDURE FOR A FITNESS REVIEW

Procedures for the Minister under Review	Procedures for Those Raising the Fitness Concern	Procedures for the Association or Committee on the Ministry	Procedures for Association or Committee Representatives
		<p>The Committee on the Ministry considers all information and prepares recommendations for consideration by the Association's governing board. The Committee must determine:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If, based upon its examination and judgment, the Committee recommends that each specific allegation or concern be viewed as founded or unfounded. 2. If, based upon its examination and judgment, the Committee recommends that the person be viewed as currently fit for ministry in the United Church of Christ. 3. In light of the Committee's recommendations in items one and two, the Committee recommends a specific outcome from the available options. <p>The Committee on the Ministry presents its recommended outcome to the governing board of the Association.</p> <p>The Association governing board acts on the recommendation of the Committee on the Ministry.</p>	
		<p>The outcomes available to the Association include one of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Reaffirmation of Fitness 2. Referral to a Situational Support Consultation 	

A CHART SUMMARIZING THE PROCEDURE FOR A FITNESS REVIEW

Procedures for the Minister under Review	Procedures for Those Raising the Fitness Concern	Procedures for the Association or Committee on the Ministry	Procedures for Association or Committee Representatives
		3. Conditional Affirmation of Fitness with a Pre-scribed Program of Growth 4. Censure 5. Suspension 6. Termination	
<p>The person meets with the representative of the body making the final decision to receive the decision, receive pastoral support, and to seek reconciliation in the situation.</p> <p>The person's support person may also be present for the meeting.</p>	<p>The person who raised the fitness question meets with the representative of the body making the final decision to learn what was decided, receive pastoral support, and to seek reconciliation in the situation.</p> <p>The person's support person may also be present for the meeting.</p>		<p>A representative of the body making the final decision offers to meet with the person who has been under review and also with those who raised the fitness question to communicate and interpret the decision, to relate to the persons pastorally, and to seek reconciliation.</p> <p>The persons' support persons may also be present for the meeting.</p>
		<p>The outcome of a Fitness Review is reported to the Association, the Conference, and to Local Church Ministries.</p> <p>Suspensions or terminations of authorization are also reported to the Office of General Ministries as changes in ministerial authorization.</p>	
<p>The person may file an appeal of the decision of the Committee on the Ministry if all the following conditions are met:</p>	<p>The person may file an appeal of the decision of the Committee on the Ministry if all the following conditions are met:</p>	<p>The decision of the Committee on the Ministry may be appealed to the Association governing board or body, if all the following conditions are met:</p>	

A CHART SUMMARIZING THE PROCEDURE FOR A FITNESS REVIEW

Procedures for the Minister under Review	Procedures for Those Raising the Fitness Concern	Procedures for the Association or Committee on the Ministry	Procedures for Association or Committee Representatives
<p>1. The Association has provided the Committee on the Ministry with authority to render a decision on behalf of the Association;</p> <p>2. The bylaws of the Association make provision for an appeal of the Committee decisions;</p> <p>3. The decision rendered was adverse to the interests of the person;</p> <p>4. The person believes the Committee on the Ministry failed to follow the process and procedures of the Association.</p> <p>There is no appeal if any of the above conditions are not met.</p> <p>Since the Association has final authority, there is no appeal of a decision of the Association governing body or of an Ecclesiastical Council.</p>	<p>1. The Association has provided the Committee on the Ministry with authority to render a decision on behalf of the Association;</p> <p>2. The bylaws of the Association make provision for an appeal of the Committee decisions;</p> <p>3. The decision rendered was adverse to the interests of the person;</p> <p>4. The person believes the Committee on the Ministry failed to follow the process and procedures of the Association.</p> <p>There is no appeal if any of the above conditions are not met.</p> <p>Since the Association has final authority, there is no appeal of a decision of the Association governing body or of an Ecclesiastical Council.</p>	<p>1. The Association has provided the Committee on the Ministry with authority to render a decision on behalf of the Association;</p> <p>2. The bylaws of the Association make provision for an appeal of the Committee decisions;</p> <p>3. A party who has been adversely affected by the decision appeals on the grounds that the Committee on the Ministry failed to follow the Association's policies and procedures in reaching the decision.</p> <p>There is no appeal if any of the above conditions are not met.</p> <p>Since the Association has final authority, there is no appeal of a decision of the Association governing body or of an Ecclesiastical Council.</p>	

**CONSTITUTION AND BYLAW PROVISIONS FOR
OVERSIGHT OF MINISTRIES AUTHORIZED BY THE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST****Constitution of the United Church of Christ
(2000 Edition)****ARTICLE VIII. ASSOCIATIONS AND CONFERENCES****Associations**

41. An Association is that body which grants, certifies to, transfers and terminates ordained ministerial standing or ordained ministerial partner standing in the United Church of Christ.

Conferences Acting as Associations

52. A Conference may exercise the functions of an Association when they are delegated to it by an Association or where no Association exists.

Bylaws of the United Church of Christ (2000 Edition)**ARTICLE I. THE MINISTRY****Ordained Ministry**

106. The Committees on the Ministry of the Conference and Association cooperate in examining the candidate to determine ability; reasons for seeking the office of the ordained Christian ministry; educational and theological attainments; knowledge of the history, polity, and practices of the United Church of Christ; and growth in Christian faith and experience; and make their recommendation of fitness to the Association. If upon acceptance of the recommendation or upon further examination and decision by the Association itself, the candidate is found to be qualified, ordination thereby is authorized, subject to a call recognized by the Association.

Commissioned Ministers

145. The Committees on the Ministry of the Conference and Association cooperate in examining the applicant with respect to Christian faith, character, ability to do the work expected, and as to education and training to meet the responsibilities of the office to be filled, and make their recommendation of fitness to the Association. If upon acceptance of the recommendation or upon further examination and decision by the Association itself, the applicant is found to be qualified, commissioning thereby is authorized.

Licensed Ministers

152. The Committee on the Ministry of the Association examines the applicant with respect to Christian faith, character, ability to do the work expected, and knowledge of the history, polity, and practices of the United

Church of Christ. If the applicant is found to be qualified, a license is granted by the Association for not more than one year at a time to serve in a designated Local Church or within that Association. Following a review by the Committee on the Ministry, the license may be renewed.

Ordained Ministerial Standing

109. An Ordained Minister moving from the bounds of one Association to another applies for a transfer of ordained ministerial standing to the new Association.

110. An Ordained Minister engaged in parish ministry has standing in the Association in which the Local Church served has standing. An Ordained Minister engaged in other than the parish ministry has standing in the Association where his or her Local Church membership is held.

111. An Ordained Minister engaged in a ministry requiring prolonged absence from the United States, or one that does not permit a fixed residence, is entitled to have ordained ministerial standing in the Association of his or her choice.

112. An Ordained Minister who withdraws from active service in the ordained ministry prior to retirement applies to his or her Association for leave of absence. The Association may grant such leave of absence for one year at a time. Except in special cases, such leave of absence is not granted for more than five years in succession.

113. An Ordained Minister retiring from active service by reason of age or disability retains ordained ministerial standing in the Association of his or her choice.

114. An Ordained Minister of the United Church of Christ serving a Local Church not affiliated with the United Church of Christ or the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or serving a local church of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) without ordained ministerial partner standing retains ordained ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ so long as his or her Association approves.

115. A pastor's church membership is in the Local Church which he or she serves, but such membership shall not affect his or her standing in the United Church of Christ or disqualify that pastor from serving as a delegate to the General Synod or holding elective office in that body.

Discipline of Ministers

155. The discipline of Ordained Ministers, persons with ordained ministerial partner standing, Commissioned Ministers, and Licensed Ministers is the responsibility of the Association in which their current ecclesiastical authorization is held.

156. All authorizations for ordained ministerial standing, for ordained ministerial partner standing, and for commissioned and licensed ministry granted by an Association are subject to periodic review by that Association.

Ordained Ministers from Other Denominations

133. When a disciplinary review is instituted in relation to a person holding ordained ministerial partner standing in the United Church of Christ, the Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in which the person's ordained ministerial standing is maintained shall be informed and invited to participate in the procedures.

136. A person who holds ordained ministerial partner standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) shall relate to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for his or her primary support and accountability in ordained ministry.

137. A person who holds ordained ministerial partner standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is subject to periodic review by the Association in which ordained ministerial standing is maintained.

145. When a disciplinary procedure is instituted by a Region in relation to a person holding ordained ministerial partner standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Church of Christ Association in which standing is held shall be informed and invited to participate. The Association may accept the procedures and outcome of the Region or utilize its own procedures to determine the person's ongoing standing in the United Church of Christ.

ARTICLE II. ASSOCIATIONS AND CONFERENCES

Associations

163. An Association receives under its care students for the ordained ministry and extends to them fellowship, counsel, assistance, and supervision during their academic preparation.

166. An Association ordains, commissions, and licenses qualified candidates; grants, certifies to, transfers, and terminates ordained ministerial standing and ordained ministerial partner standing; installs Ordained Ministers and persons with ordained ministerial partner standing; grants privilege of call and leaves of absence; reviews and disciplines Ordained, Commissioned, and Licensed Ministers and persons with ordained ministerial partner standing; and verifies that an Ordained Ministerial Partner has demonstrated knowledge of, and appreciation for, the history, polity, and practices of the United Church of Christ.