

GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS OF GROWTH

Following a Fitness Review, a Committee on Ministry may determine that a program of growth is necessary to create the conditions under which an individual with standing may have their fitness for ministry and standing reaffirmed. A program of growth is required when the outcome of a Fitness Review is Conditional Affirmation, Censure, or Suspension.

Fitness Reviews as a whole are exceedingly vulnerable experiences, and ministers as well as Committee on Ministry (COM) members should acknowledge this at every stage of the process. It is difficult to realize that while one does many things well in ministry, one has also done something inappropriate or wrong in ways that have caused harm to others. There is a strong temptation to go into damage control mode, to deny or minimize the misconduct, to rationalize or compartmentalize the behavior, to feel angry or attacked. If the minister can get past this, there is a corollary temptation for the minister to move into self-pity or helplessness, believing that all the good they have done is a sham.¹ The Committee on Ministry's role is to determine how best to create the conditions by which a program of growth can help the minister to integrate the destructive behavior that gave rise to the Fitness Review into their self-understanding as a gifted but imperfect minister and servant of God.

The Committee on Ministry asks: what changes need to be demonstrated by the person to the Committee before they can be reaffirmed for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ? Are there other actions that need to be taken by the minister (written apology, repayment of financial debt, etc.) before their standing can be reaffirmed? What timeline is anticipated for assessing the program of growth? What tools, resources, or contacts will enable the minister to achieve the growth necessary to faithfully and effectively minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ?

A comprehensive growth plan takes into account the circumstances that gave rise to the misconduct and the impact the minister's behavior has had on others, the findings of the Committee on Ministry, the response of the minister to the concerns being raised, the capacity of the minister to understand their behavior and their willingness to change, and the support systems surrounding the minister. It provides an opportunity for a minister to gain greater self-knowledge about their vulnerabilities, take responsibility for their actions, and develop strategies to prevent future similar actions.

The purpose of the program of growth is to give the minister the tools to enable them to commit to healthy and effective ministry, and to facilitate their willingness to use those tools. Therefore, an effective program of growth includes specific benchmarks and goals for the minister to achieve. These benchmarks and goals should:

- be specific to the concerns that were raised in the Fitness Review;
- include periodic check-ins with the Committee on Ministry or Conference staff as specific points;

¹ For more information related to the typical emotional response of clergy following misconduct, see Ross Peterson's article, "Fitness for Ministry Following Misconduct," page 1. This unpublished resource is available directly from MESA.

- provide an attempt at healing for victims of misconduct when possible; and
- encompass the hope of fullness of life for the authorized minister.

A program of growth includes SMART goals: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. This means that the minister has a clear, accountable, and realistic pathway towards restoration, affirmation of fitness, and reinstatement of standing for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. A program of growth is typically between six months and two years in length. A Committee on Ministry is empowered to lengthen the period of time for the program of growth if the minister continues to make progress towards their goals.

All ministers undergoing a program of growth will benefit from a psychological assessment from an accredited agency or Ministry Development Center, with results released to the United Church of Christ and sent to the appropriate Association or Conference office. The staff performing the assessment should be made aware of the concerns raised in the Fitness Review, be given a summary of findings from the interviews conducted by the Interview Team, and know the outcome of the Fitness Review as discerned by the COM. The results of this psychological assessment will help the COM develop the rest of a comprehensive growth plan.

The most effective programs of growth build education, practice, and reflection into a holistic plan, and are supported by therapeutic practice and/or spiritual direction to identify healthy practices for all areas of the minister's life, combining "inner intentions and external support structures."² The Committee on Ministry might choose relevant parts of the UCC Ministerial Code and/or Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers, ask the minister to reflect on them in relation to the fitness concern that was raised, and require the minister to work with a mentor, therapist, and/or spiritual director to develop healthier practices. The following pages include some additional samples of the kind of SMART goals that may be appropriate for some programs of growth, along with some actions that provide more specificity, guidance, and clarity for the minister and for the Committee on Ministry:

² From Peterson, Ross. "Fitness For Ministry Following Misconduct." This unpublished resource is available directly from MESA.

GOAL	MARK/CODE	PRACTICES TO MEET THIS GOAL
<p>Address core issues that gave rise to misconduct and establishing new, healthier responses to those issues.</p>	<p>Maintaining a basic understanding of mental health and wellness.</p> <p>Maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in both my personal and professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership.</p>	<p>Therapy focused on the root causes that gave rise to the misconduct, and developing concrete plans for the future. We anticipate that you will be involved in weekly therapy for at least 12 months. The COM will provide the name of qualified providers, and the minister will inform the COM of the name of their provider prior to their first appointment. The therapist will document on-going attendance at sessions, as well as progress toward goals, and provide said documentation to the COM on a quarterly basis for the duration of the program of growth. The Minister in Question is required to obtain any necessary release of information to the COM from the provider.</p> <p>Work with a coach to address goals for ministry, healthy responses to stress, etc.</p>
<p>Integrate learnings from Boundary Training into one's life to maintain appropriate boundaries.</p>	<p>Living in relationships of covenantal accountability with God and the Church.</p> <p>Adhere to all requirements for maintaining standing.</p> <p>Honor all confidences shared with me.</p> <p>Maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in</p>	<p>Participate in a boundary training course specific to the violation (sexual misconduct, financial misconduct, drug/alcohol abuse, etc.). Reflection in therapy/spiritual direction on the boundary violation and the coursework from the boundary training.</p> <p>Integrate your learnings from this course into other aspects of the growth plan.</p>

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	both my personal and professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership	
Live within one's budget; repayment of debts incurred.	<p>Exhibiting a commitment to lifelong spiritual development and faithful personal stewardship.</p> <p>Stewarding the resources of the Church.</p> <p>Accept responsibility for all debts that I incur.</p> <p>Assess with care the implications of accepting gifts from congregation members.</p> <p>Steward church funds and property faithfully, while overseeing the administrative tasks of ministry with integrity.</p>	<p>Complete a financial management course tailored to your needs.</p> <p>After completing this financial management course, develop and execute a budget that fits your expenses and income; execute faithfully for a minimum of three months. Reflect on your progress and continue living into a financial management plan.</p>
Develop appropriate responses to others when angry or disappointed; prevent anger from becoming abusive./Manage anger appropriately in personal and professional settings.	<p>Maintaining a basic understanding of mental health and wellness.</p> <p>Preach and teach the gospel without fear or favor, regarding all persons with equal respect and concern, and undertaking to minister impartially.</p>	<p>Complete an anger management class within the first three months and explore in therapy how to use what you are learning in the class to deal with your triggers over the next six months. How are you responding differently to situations that set off your anger? What have been the effects of this? What setbacks have you encountered? How have you dealt with them?</p>

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		What tools do you have in your toolbox to help you respond in a healthy way when you are angry or disappointed?
Practice healthy boundaries and honor your departure from previous ministry setting(s); respect the pastoral authority of your successor.	<p>Living in relationships of covenantal accountability with God and the Church.</p> <p>Demonstrating excellent communication skills.</p> <p>Neither interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor, upon my departure from a ministry setting; and to deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.</p> <p>Maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in both my personal and professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership.</p> <p>Develop and maintain meaningful personal relationships outside of my ministry setting.</p>	<p>Discern, in partnership with therapist/spiritual director, what emotional and spiritual needs you were trying to meet with this misconduct. Develop strategies and way to meet these needs that do not involve exploiting others (give specific examples related to the fitness matter).</p> <p>Transfer your membership to a congregation where you have not previously served as pastor.</p> <p>Refer all pastoral requests from everyone from previous settings in ministry to their current pastor. If a current pastor is not available, refer them to Association or Conference staff.</p> <p>Do not initiate contact with anyone from previous settings of ministry, including on social media.</p> <p>Do not provide pastoral services to persons to whom you have previously served as pastor, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, etc. – even if these are not held in a church setting.</p> <p>Unfriend/unfollow all previous parishioners from social media and do not accept subsequent friend/follow requests.</p>

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		Develop a hobby involving other people unrelated to ministry or your ministry setting.
Connect with other clergy on a regular basis so that you are not isolated in your ministry practice; learn best practices for ministry from colleagues.	<p>Attending to one's own spiritual and pastoral care, including engagement in supervision as appropriate.</p> <p>Building relationships of mutual trust and interdependence.</p> <p>Recognize the communal nature of God, ensuring that ministry does not happen in isolation.</p> <p>Grow in faith, knowledge, and the practice of ministry through intentional continuing education, study, and devotional life.</p>	Create or join a cohort of individuals with whom you can be vulnerable, to whom you may turn for support and for accountability. This might be a Community of Practice, or other cohort focused on growth in the practice of ministry, and must be approved by the Committee on Ministry. Commit to being an active participant in this group for a minimum of one year. Practice being vulnerable with this group. Reflect on this experience in your therapy with the goal of actively engaging with an ongoing learning community.
Manage your sobriety in a consistent and healthy manner	<p>Practicing self-care and life balance.</p> <p>Refrain from abusive behavior including abusive behavior toward others, the abuse of alcohol, drugs, or any other substance; to seek appropriate care for physical and mental</p>	<p>Abstain from drug/alcohol consumption and participate in NA/AA (or other recovery-focused group) on a weekly basis for the duration of your program of growth.</p> <p>Address your sobriety in counseling and spiritual direction on a consistent basis.</p>

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	health concerns; and to avoid addictive behaviors.	Develop a plan to manage your sobriety once the program of growth is completed.
Address the harm you have caused others in ways that do not increase harm towards them	<p>Respecting the dignity of all God's people</p> <p>Living in relationships of covenantal accountability with God and the Church.</p> <p>Refrain from abusive behavior including abusive behavior toward others.</p>	<p>Establish a plan to prevent contact with those whom you have harmed. Practice behavioral "scripts" (such as excusing yourself and leaving) for what to do if you encounter someone you have harmed in a professional, social, or other setting.</p> <p>If appropriate, write a letter of apology. Do not share with the person(s) you have harmed except in consultation with your therapist and the COM.</p>
Refrain from sexual intimacy with parishioners or those in your care, and cultivate a deep understanding of appropriate personal relationships	<p>Engage in sexually healthy and responsible behavior.</p> <p>Honor my family commitments.</p> <p>Develop and maintain meaningful personal relationships outside of my ministry setting.</p> <p>Speak the truth, not using my position, power, or authority to exploit any person.</p> <p>Maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in both my personal and professional life,</p>	<p>Working with a mentor, therapist, and/or spiritual director:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ Reflect on themes of power, authority, intimacy, transference, and counter-transference as they relate to the pastor-parishioner relationship during your therapy/spiritual direction sessions; ▼ Define "consent" and "consensual relationship" among those with differing levels of power in intimate relationships; ▼ Come to an understanding of what is healthy and unhealthy with regard to relationships among those you are called to serve as pastor that is consistent

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	including within the Local Church where I hold membership.	<p>with UCC expectations for clergy.</p> <p>Engage in work in a 12-step group focused on unhealthy sexual addictions (if relevant).</p> <p>Reflect on how the values of Our Whole Lives relate to issues of power and intimacy in the pastoral relationship.</p>
Cultivate or renew daily spiritual practices in order to ground and center yourself in God.	<p>Praying actively and nurturing spiritual practices.</p> <p>Exhibiting a commitment to lifelong spiritual development.</p> <p>Demonstrate a sincere yearning for connection with the triune God, expressed in prayer, worship, Bible study, retreat, and other spiritual practices.</p>	<p>Cultivate or renew daily spiritual practices.</p> <p>Meet at least every two weeks for at least six months with a pastor or spiritual director for prayer and discernment of one's vocation and one's life.</p> <p>Establish spiritual practices to sustain your ministry and faith, individually and communally.</p>

The Committee on Ministry is responsible for regularly assessing the progress of the minister's growth plan. At minimum, a COM can expect to be in touch with a minister monthly for the first few months of the growth plan, followed by quarterly until its completion. At the conclusion of the growth plan, the Committee on Ministry determines whether to reaffirm the minister's fitness for ministry, extend the period of time of the growth plan, or terminate the minister's standing. A minister's failure to demonstrate progress with the program of growth (either because they are unwilling or unable to do so) are grounds for suspension or termination of ministerial standing.